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イラスト@ヤス



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わたしたちの田村くん

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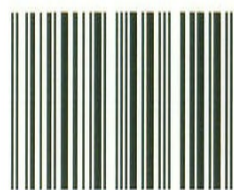
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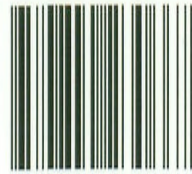
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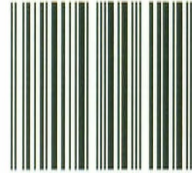
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Watashitachi no Tamura-kun - Volume 01

Chapter 00-01

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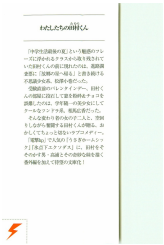
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Novel Illustrations

These are the novel illustrations that were included in volume 1



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Prologue

Volume 1 Prologue[\[edit\]](#)

故郷の星に、帰ること
——それが私の進路希望。
松澤小巻、十五歳。
私の家は月にあるから、
いつもここからこうして見上げて、
うさぎの耳で電波を受信。
両手を伸ばして返事を送信。
迎えのロケットが来るそのときまで、
私はここぞ、待っているだけ。







Translator notes and references[[edit](#)]

1. [↑ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denpa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Denpa)

Part 1: Homesick Rabbit of the Moon

First Part: Homesick Rabbit of the Moon[[edit](#)]



Part 1[[edit](#)]

Everyone used to call me the reincarnation of Jean-Henri Fabre, the father of modern entomology.

When I was in third grade, my cicada life-cycle observation diary won the town fair's top prize. I think that was the time when I was the most popular in my life. Everyone called me the "Insect Professor," and I was the center of everyone's attention.

The reason that I got such a fantastic nickname was because of my family.

That's right! The Tamura family has three sons.

Everyone in my town knows about the genius eldest son, the athletic all-rounder youngest son, and the ordinary middle son. That ordinary middle son is indeed me.

My smart and bright older brother is the pride of my parents; my active and cheerful younger brother is everyone's darling. Of course, with these two attention-catching sons, my family was always bustling with excitement.

Whenever our family became that lively, the ordinary me was always pushed aside. No matter which photo albums you opened, you would find me with my arms crossed at my chest or my finger resting on my chin, observing my brothers and my parents (who had their heads spinning from my brothers) from the sidelines.

Now that I think about this carefully, the one thing that I developed from being in the Tamura family was my keen observation skills... I think.

Unfortunately, time is cruel. As the years passed, one by one my friends outgrew insect-loving hobbies. Instead of trading beetles, they traded monsters in video games. Instead of sharing news about where one could catch grasshoppers, they now shared news on which bookstores had the newest manga and magazines. Finally, field guides to insects were replaced with 《The Mysteries of Human Body: A Guide to Identifying Male and Female Body Parts》...

I lost my only medal.

It probably started around that time! I didn't know if my relatives were doing this out of kindness to comfort me or what, but I increasingly began to hear things like this:

“Yukisada will definitely grow up to be a very impressive man!”

The Auntie next door also said:

“You are definitely going to be very successful one day!”

Even my homeroom teacher was no exception.

“Yukisada, I know very well that you have potential...”

...in other words, she meant, “even though you don't amount to anything right now...”

Ahem! I don't need you people to tell me that. I know the truth myself. Thus right now, after studying insects, my second hobby became studying ancient folk stories and customs.

By the way, I'm very interested in the social customs of the Kamakura period at the moment — things like dark-brown dyed hitatares^[1] and samurai-eboshi^[2]. And you can't discuss this topic without mentioning the armor, helmet, white toodoshi, and red toodoshi^[3] ... these garments are beautiful, extravagant yet majestic, and decorated with indescribable subtlety. The true spirit of the Japanese man can be found in this clothing style.

Ah ah, hmmm ... Hmm?!

I was about to take action—

But then, tragedy struck.

It happened last night.

At first, I was only flipping through an ancient customs fact book. As I was reading it, I became nostalgic about that time period. A character. Wandering and visiting Kamakura. Before I realized it, I was holding my older brother's bamboo sword in front of my room's mirror, and posing like a samurai in the middle of the night—

I pulled out the bamboo sword in my hand:

"I am indeed Tamura Yukisada. Come, let us duel!" ^[4]

I uttered under my breath.

Just at that moment, my room door suddenly opened in response. The owner of the bamboo stick—my elder brother—appeared at the door!

"Hey! Do you have my dictionary? ...what are you doing?"

Kya—

Last night, I almost screamed then.

Whenever I think about that incident, my face becomes red hot. I get so embarrassed that I act like a girl and cover my face with my hands. I could only comfort myself by thinking: I'm already lucky. I've done things even more shameful than this... ahh... but....

"Hey, Tamura. Were you listening to my question?"

Someone shook my shoulders a few times and pulled me back to reality. When I lifted my head, I saw an unremarkable yet familiar face. This was my good friend ever since the days I was called the "Insect Professor". His name is Takaura.

"Hey, Takaura."

"...Haa? You weren't listening to my question at all!"

Takaura sighed exasperatedly and then pointed his finger towards my nose.

"I'll say it again, so listen to me this time. Hmm— Do you know what "time" it is?"

Takaura looked dubious with his hesitant expression and head tilted slightly sideways. It was a mystery to me what he was trying to accomplish. But I didn't want others to think I had Alzheimer's disease or something, so I tried to answer the question:

"Right now, it's the second half of lunch break."

"I'm not asking you that! Can you think... like... calendar-wise?"

"Calendar-wise? Then it's July?"

By the way, the final exam was in two weeks. After final exams was summer vacation. From the perspective of a student taking exams, you could say that right now was the crucial moment.

"No! You really are dumb! You don't understand at all, do you? The correct answer is, "The last summer of junior high school life"!"

"...mu~n..."

I fell into a daze and habitually started to chew my pencil. I moved my gaze towards the windows.

The last summer of junior high school life? In this world, there isn't a person who is sentimental enough to have that marked on their calendar.

Outside the window, the high-noon summer sky was boundlessly clear. The dazzling bright, light blue sky made me feel refreshed. The sound of cicadas could be heard near and far ... oh, what a scene! The symphony of crickets and

cicadas.

As I listened to their summer symphony, my hand started to play around with my pencil. On my desk was a half-finished school survey form^[5]. Today was the deadline to hand it in.

When I was halfway through filling out the form, the scene from last night suddenly appeared in my mind. Because it was too embarrassing, I stopped writing.

I had already written down my first-choice potential high school. My class year, class name, seat number, and my signature were left to be filled in.

Ta - mura - Yuki - sada!

...Not that I'm boasting, but I have to say this is an impressive name! Even though no one's ever told me this, I always think to myself: this name sounds a bit like a samurai's name.

After I filled in everything, I gave my form to Takaura. To be honest, he's always wanted to be the class representative (who knew he'd actually end up becoming a candidate for the job?). He's a pervert who can even enjoy boring work like collecting survey forms.

"Ok, Tamura handed in his form, let's check his name off. Hmm, it looks like there are still some people who haven't turned theirs in ... no, no, no, that's not important. Back to the topic! The last summer of junior high school life!"

This truly perverted kid winked his eyes and leaned towards me. Even if you wanted me to say something more, but—

"...So what? I can only answer you with this phrase. If that's an acceptable answer, then please by all means continue on!"

Rather than continuing this discussion, I would rather pick my nose. As a matter of fact, I'll go do that.

"Agghh, you don't understand at all, do you! Don't give me lame answers like "so what?". You should have noticed, right? If you keep on spacing out like this, you'll be completely left behind!"

Takaura suddenly grabbed my hands. They were passionately hot hands. For a

moment, the two of us gazed at each other... sparks were glinting in our eyes... huh?

“I'll be... left behind?”

“You've never even noticed you were left behind! Look at this!”

Takaura pulled a piece of paper folded three times out of his shirt pocket. When he opened it up, I saw it was an A4-size contact list. In the list were the names, phone numbers, and addresses of the students in this class. I backed up a bit.

“...wow, you actually carry this thing around everywhere? You are way too dangerous...”

“Look again closely. The main focus is these lines!”

Takaura pointed at the lines he probably drew himself. The pencil lines connected the neatly spaced names together.

“First up is this couple. Here, Suzuki Chikato and... here, Nomura. Listen, you'll be shocked by this. These two people have been dating since last month!”

“Wh-what?!”

Upon hearing this mortifying news, my upper body naturally straightened itself and leaned forward. You mean this actually happened?! That “Old Hag” Suzuki Chikato with “33B Alley Cat” [\[6\]](#) Nomura? These two people are having lovey-dovey smoochy moments with each other?

“U-unimaginable!”

“Unacceptable, right?”

While ignoring the awestruck me, Takaura's mechanical pencil kept on producing uncomfortable scratching sounds as Takaura darkened the line connecting Suzuki and Nomura together.

“It's too early to be surprised. Hayashi and Kobayashi, Amano and Ishioka—even shocking couplings like these have appeared! I think these two over here became a couple right at the start of this month. And then you have him with her... her with him... this one is together with Yokoyama from the class next door... and... those two broke up already. These two broke up as well... and these

two are are together... something like that."

The class contact list... no, calling this sheet of paper a "Relationship Map" was closer to the truth. My eyes followed the mechanical pencil's movements, and I almost became dizzy just by watching. Most of the lines connected two names together. Some lines stopped halfway through, some lines advanced in zigzag movements, others lead to multiple names, and some were unidirectional only. All these lines went in all sorts of random directions.

They avoided a few specific names, however.

"Wh-when did the situation degenerate to this point?"

I could not help but lift my shaking finger, put it on the paper, and softly touch the empty and awkward area around my name (and Takaura's). This was a very very crushing truth. Along with a few scarce others, my name (and Takaura's) had been completely isolated from that tangled mess of complex black lines. Our names stood out so much that I couldn't help but feel depressed. So that was why! Now, I couldn't disagree with the truth. I (and Takaura) have indeed been left behind. While I had been picking my nose moronically, these complex lines had already interconnected my fellow classmates.

"'This is our last summer vacation in junior high school! If we don't leave ourselves some wonderful memories to reminisce over later in life, this will be horrible!' — I heard the girls saying this. Most of them started to vigorously search for sweethearts at the end of last month, the rest did so at the beginning of this month... In other words, a confession craze is spreading all around us."

Confession!

"...Craze?"

"Don't show that strange look. Haven't you felt it? The mood: 'If now is my only chance to be successful, then now is the time to do it.' Even if you get rejected, once you graduate you won't see each other anymore. On the other hand, if they say yes, you'll have a wonderful summer waiting for you. Moreover, regardless of how long the relationship lasts—according to the female students, you get assigned into different groups based on whether you've had love experience."

“...what groups?”

“Well I know exactly what the girls mean! When you look at this contact list, don’t you feel like we’ve already been separated into two different camps?”

I looked at the relationship map, and I instantly understood what this kid was saying. The first group was those who had their names buried in the whirlpool of black lines. The other group was people like Takaura and myself. The space around our names was totally clear and far away from the mess.

In other words...

“One side has good luck with relationships, and the other side has no luck at all...”[\[7\]](#)

“Exactly! In other words, it's the popular and the unpopular. You and I have extremely unremarkable looks and personalities, so we're the kind of nobodies that nobody will notice...”

“Obviously we're on the unpopular side...”

Sa....sa....[\[8\]](#)

“Oh, it sucks to be on ‘this side’ of the camp, right? You won't accept this, right? If we continue the way we are, by the time we're 20 we'll still be virgins, by 30 we'll still be single, by 40 our heads will go bald, by 50, eh, hmm...”

I gasped. How would my future turn out? By the time I reached 50, what kind of tragedy would await me?!

“Forget it. Anyway, I definitely don't want to reach that sorry state! Therefore, I will board this fashion trend and get a girlfriend! Then, right before getting into high school and starting the next stage of my life, I will join ‘the other side’! This is my plan!”

—At that moment, my body almost collapsed.

“You know...”

“Tamura! Are you willing to be like this forever?”

“It is true that I don’t want to be like this...”

No matter how unremarkable I was, I was still a normal puberty-driven male

student. If I could to choose between being “in a relationship” and being “isolated from relationships”, of course I would prefer the former category. I'd lift my head high and walk down that sunny road known as “life”.

But!

“...Takaura, our world is actually very small. To us, this town...no, this classroom is basically our whole world, right?”

“Ha? Yeah, something like that... why'd you ask that all of a sudden?”

I answered Takaura with a nod and slowly stood up. And then:

“You just said that you wanted to get a girlfriend, right? Why don't you open your eyes and look carefully. In our world, these are your potential girlfriend candidates! Look at them!”

We looked around the familiar square classroom.

「Really, that's really disgusting... as your friend... I recommend that you go to the hospital... Don't you get hungry?」

See...

「Yesterday I went to Shizuka-senpai's home (she's one year older than me). I met a guy... he was driving a toreeraa (trailer truck)... he drank a bottle of miruku (powder milk) all in one go...」

As I said...

*「I feel so energetic right now I think I am going to break down (*laugh*). If my other personalities (Kurenai - Seiryuu - Choya [\[9\]](#)) came out right now, you girls would be dead (*laugh*). You girls better not make me angry (*laugh*). My smiling face is very scary~~ that's what everyone says (*laugh*).」*

...do you understand now?

“How's that, Takaura. This is—”

“Ha?! Was that Tamura just staring at us?”

“No way?! What are you looking at? You need to pay money to look at us!”

—This was the true face of our female classmates.

I couldn't even finish my sentence. I just collapsed onto my desk silently. What's going on? Was this a zoo? How was I supposed to become attracted to these people, fall in love, and confess to them? Where was my true 'soul mate'? Could someone tell me where she was—?

“Ta-Tamura, pull yourself together! This is only a light wound!”

“...I can't go on any further... you can go on alone to the 'other side'... don't worry about me... I'll stay on 'this side' for the rest... of my life...”

“Tamura! Don't die on me!”

“.....Fare... well.....”

Ahhh, what a short life. I slowly closed my eyes as darkness began to consume my solitary heart—

“Bu-fuu?!”

Panic!

Out of nowhere, an unidentified flying object suddenly covered my whole face. I was so surprised that I snatched at it by reflex.

“What the heck is this?!”

I stood up from my seat.

“Fu~a”

Suddenly there was a strange sound.

It was as if time became suspended.

The distance was so close that I could vaguely feel the warmth of a body.

About 10 centimeters in front of my nose—

That person was standing there.

And then.

“.....sorry”

Our eyes levels were almost even.



Her lips, which were so small that one couldn't help but doubt oneself, were opened slightly. The sound that came from her mouth was so soft that one couldn't feel any emotion from it.

Sorry, she said.

“...That... Excuse me?”

That... Excuse me?

“I... that... that's my form. The wind blew it here.”

I... that... that's my form. The wind... eh?

“Ah?! My-my gosh!”

By the time I realized it, it was too late. The unknown object that covered my face— it only took one glance to know that the paper was the school survey form. The form was currently being crushed in my hand into a crumbled ball of paper.

“I am so sorry—”

What's her name—oh yeah, her name is...

"S-Sorry... Matsuzawa."

...That's the right name, right? Matsuzawa... really... what a strange name... indeed.

Matsuzawa Komaki.

On her pale and small face, her brown eyes were glittering strangely. Those two eyes were staring straight at me. I couldn't help but stare back at those glass-marble-like pupils.

"I'll straighten up this form right away."

Before I realized what was going on, I had already begun to unravel that crumbled ball of a survey form—

".....It's okay."

She took away the form. No, the form was hers to begin with. She took back the form.

Without hesitation, Matsuzawa handed the almost scrap-paper-like crumbled form to Takaura and walked back to her seat next to the windows. She moved through through the narrow gaps between the desks. Her hips under her skirt were as small as a child's. Her ankles, dressed in the socks of the school uniform, looked just like the legs of an antelope. Her thin shoulders, her delicate back and... could a small body like hers actually have organs in it? Does she even have to go to the bathroom?

".....Wait wait. Tamura? When will you snap out of it?"

Her shoulder-length hair, softy afloat on the light wind and shimmering under the sunny sky, looked amazing. I think this hairstyle is called a Bob Cut. As Matsuzawa returned to her seat, her fabulous hair drifted behind her. Afterwards, she looked out the windows with disinterest.

"Tamura— Hey— Tamuraa!"

She never spoke loudly, and she never hung around those rude people. Matsuzawa always just sat there alone, gazing up towards the sky. Even when the light wind disheveled her hair, she remained indifferent; she looked just like a

clay doll.

Wait....

Wait wait wait!

She's here!

Matsuzawa Komaki.

After entering ninth grade^[10], this was the first time she was in my class. Before that, I never even knew she existed. From what I heard, she moved to our town when she entered junior high school. She was a mysterious girl with an unknown past. Actually, her grades were amazingly good—I knew this because after starting ninth grade, our grade's mock exam results were always posted.

There was someone like Matsuzawa is in this class?

This was the first time I spoke to her.

This was the first time I looked at her from such a short distance.

What was it? Those brilliant eyes, that pale and smooth skin so clear and flawless that it seemed like her skin glowed. Was the light so bright that I dared not move my eyes away?

When I finally came about:

"It is my fault."

I apologized.

"Until today, I've never noticed you before."

"Tamura— wake up— your eyes are goggling—"

"I never knew that you were such a perfect girl... Hey, Takaura, Matsuzawa is really cute!"

"...Eh. Are you serious?"

I finally turned my head around and looked at Takaura's unremarkable face that I had completely ignored earlier.

"Of course I am serious! What would I gain from lying? She's really cute. Look, just her delicate movements set her apart from anyone else!"

As I was about to point my finger towards her:

“!”

Matsuzawa sneezed intensely.

“Wow, what a powerful sneeze. She's covering her nose.....a runny nose? Just as what I'd expect from Matsuzawa, her handkerchief is pink.”

“Tamura, you haven’t...”

“I will change that ‘you haven’t’ into reality! I will step into the 'Other Side' with her!”

I half giggled, and unhesitantly announced this declaration. Even though I heard a strange sound coming from Takaura’s throat, who cared about him! Matsuzawa was just too perfect! I was really sorry that I had never noticed her until today... wait a second?!

“Damn it! Let me see that relationship map!”

I suddenly realized something. I hurriedly snatched the map away from Takaura’s hands. For such a perfect girl, don’t tell me that some other male student had already tainted her with his dirty hands?!

“Very good... safe!”

The name “Matsuzawa Komaki” didn't have any offensive black lines around it. I relaxed instantly. I was very nervous earlier. Now all I had to do was connect her name and my name together—with a thick, thick line!

“Tamura, you know... Matsuzawa isn't as ‘safe’ as you think she is...”

“Agggghhh, shut up! Stop bothering Matsuzawa and me!”

“Think about it... Matsuzawa is really cute, that’s true. But, why is she on the ‘unpopular’ side of the camp? Don’t you think that’s very strange?”

“What strange luck!”

“Don’t you think that there must be some sort of logic behind it? We're unpopular because we don’t stand out. But what about Matsuzawa? What do you think it is for her?”

“Destiny!”

“I'm being very serious here. I advise that you give up on her while you can. Matsuzawa is not a character you can go for. At most, she's a weirdo who is there just to push the plot forward. Even if you can get into dialogue mode with her, there won't be any event CGs. She doesn't even have moving facial sprites. There's no way of getting to her ending because right from the start, her plot route doesn't exist.”

“...You sure are fluent with this game jargon.”

“Be quiet. Hm, I will show you. I really shouldn't do this, but...”

While trying to shield his actions with his body, Takaura unfolded the crumbled sheet of paper—which was Matsuzawa's survey form—then, he showed it to me. Just as I was about to complain to this rouge class representative about how immoral his actions were, I stopped—

“Hmmm?”

For just an instant, Matsuzawa's private personal information was uncovered.

Before I could comprehend the meaning of the words on the form, Takaura took the form away. He lowered his voice and asked me whether I understood. But, what I just saw was not something one could understand the first time reading it.

I started to think back to what was written in the entry box for her first-choice school.

The phrase, “Return to my home planet high school”—no, wait a second. The words, “High School”, were already printed on the form. Therefore... what?

“Return to my home planet?”

I slightly tilted my head as I tried my best to comprehend the meaning of that phrase. Takaura, with his already lowered voice, lightly poked my arm:

“...Let me tell you something beforehand. That girl has written the same thing on her forms multiple times already. No matter how harshly the homeroom teacher lectures her, she still does the same thing every time. The incident even

turned into gossip in our grade. Everyone knows about this.”

“...Home... planet...”

“To be frank, this is why people stay away from Matsuzawa. So you better give up. She—”

Stop, Takaura. I made a hushing sound to stop Takaura from continuing.

“Say no more. I completely understand now. So that was why.”

“...Sigh. Normal girls can be found everywhere, so why don’t you...”

“Matsuzawa has such a funny sense of humor!”

Takaura just tripped in a classic fashion. But, I didn't have time to care about his lame performance. ‘Return to my home planet’. How romantic, how affectionate, and how lovely Matsuzawa was! If even Takaura was trying to talk me out of going after her, that meant I didn't have to worry about having a huge group of competitors! Yes, Matsuzawa! This was the best!

“Sigh...”

Takaura sighed deeply and lowered his head. Sorry man, while you waste your time sighing, I'll go ahead and join the 'other side' first.

Because, no matter how much you try to argue, now really was “the last summer of junior high school life”!

Part 2[[edit](#)]

The moment my alarm clock went off, I sprang out of bed.

On this dreary blue morning, I washed my face with twice the diligence and brushed my teeth with twice the attentiveness. Then, I applied some of my bro's hair gel on my bangs and admired myself in the mirror.

"Matsuzawa, please go out with me!"

I raised the corners of my mouth, and practiced a smile. Yes!

I changed into my uniform. After everything was ready, I briskly flew down the stairs to the living room on the first floor. On the way, a strong aroma filled my

nose. This was the scent of the miso soup we had every day.

Probably because she heard my footsteps from the kitchen, my mother turned her head.

"Good mor— ...oh!"

Her astonished expression.

"I thought you were your older brother! Why are you up so early today?"

"Hmmpphhh! Starting today, this is the time I'm gonna leave the house. Better be prepared!"

"Really... Oh dear! The pot's going to burn!"

My mother completely missed the new confidence I specifically put into my posture... agh, what was with her? I hurriedly sat down at the table, helped myself to some rice, and picked up my chopsticks after saying, "Itadakimasu"[\[11\]](#).

"Hey, why don't you help me wake up your older brother and Takayuki! Your older brother said he has to attend the student council morning session, since the TV committee wanted him to go."

"As expected of the best former class president there ever was!"

"Speaking of Takayuki, don't you remember he has that? The Brazil Invitational. Since he was selected again, there's no way he can attend baseball practice for now. At the very least, he needs to let his coach know."

"Brazil... So this year he's focusing on soccer?"

"Really, I think things are starting to get hectic again! Hey, if you're not going to help wake them up for me, hurry up and finish your breakfast. Aghh—I'm so busy! Is Dad still sleeping?"

"I'm full, I'm leaving!"

"Oh? You're really leaving now? Why?"

Why? Good question. I'll answer you then!

"Starting today, I'm going to run a marathon at school every day! See ya later!"

I put my mother muttering, "What a strange child", behind me, and I skipped

across the stairs of our front porch in a spurt of energy. I headed towards the early morning streets.

The time was only seven o'clock. Although the sunlight was getting harsh, thankfully there was a cool breeze, so it wasn't too hot.

With huge strides forward, I traveled three times my usual speed on the usual route to school, practically running and jumping all the way. The goal was the familiar school gate. My chest felt restless, so I couldn't slow down. My mind was filled with the ambition to reach the destination sooner, so I was wholeheartedly focused on swinging my legs in tandem. This was probably the first time I ever wanted to get to school so early.

There was only one reason! And that was because Matsuzawa was there.

"H-H-Hey..."

"Mreooow!?"

I unconsciously got a little spooked. I happened to run into a cat that hissed like it had encountered some terrible thing. But I couldn't control myself that much.

Every morning, it looked like Matsuzawa would go jogging by herself.

The person who told me this intelligence was actually Takaura. Although he had repeatedly urged me to "give up on Matsuzawa", he confronted me at homeroom before going home—

"I can't decide if you two might actually be suited for each other. After thinking about it, I realized this might become quite interesting..."

He finally changed his mind. Afterwards, he kindly told me some great news he heard from the girls in the class. According to his source, Masuzu was formerly a member of the track and field club before quitting this year. Speaking of which, I never knew that. I promise! Even if I join the "other side", I will always love this Takaura who supported me all the way!

As I passed the school gates, I charged straight into the entrance stairs and sprinted in the hallways deficient of the usual sounds of people talking. I entered my deserted and silent classroom and put down my bag. Finding it too

troublesome to go to the locker room, I changed into gym clothes on the spot, and then headed for the athletic fields.

Then—

"Matsuzawa"

Found her! She really was here! A wonderful kind of ticklish feeling seemed to well up inside my body, and it made me want to roll over the floor and celebrate.

Dressed in gym clothes, Matsukawa ran effortlessly like the wind, looking weightless as if she didn't feel the slightest pull of gravity.

Far away. The sun shined on the side of her face. The glare of the sun streaked over the curve of her nose, just like a solar eclipse.

I entered the track, and prepared to catch up with her. Matsukawa seemed like she hadn't noticed me, so in order to run beside her, needed to start quickly. Was I nervous? Of course not.

Last night I rehearsed it once. 「Yo, what a coincidence!」 —I would effortlessly start the conversation from behind her. Matsuzawa would be shocked and look back. 「Ah! Tamura-kun. How are you?」 「I just suddenly wanted to go for a run.」 ...After that, the conversation would automatically expand on its own, and we'd chat more and more enthusiastically. But since I wasn't nervous or rushed, I'd maintain an indifferent expression and casually throw in a finishing line, 「I guess it's about time. We'll be late to class!」. Then, I'd turn to leave. And from behind me: 「Huh? I still wanted to talk with you more... that's weird? That shouldn't be the case... this is my first time... having this kind of feeling...」. I was convinced Matsukawa would act just like that.

Perfect.

But now there was another problem—

Thump, thump, thump, thump, thump —me. [\[12\]](#)

Thumpthumpthumpthumpthumpthump —Matsuzawa.

"Huh? Why..."

—Why can't I catch up to Matsuzawa? Aaah, Matsuzawa, you're too amazing. Even your running speed is that fast!

What should I do?!

The distance between us didn't shorten at all. I looked at Matsuzawa's back as I thought about a plan. That being said, since this was an O-shaped track, wouldn't we run in a circle? Right, yes!

Very honorably, I made a shortcut across the track. Although this was a deviation from my plan, I might as well try approaching Matsuzawa from the side. Subsequently—

"Yo! Matsuzawa!"

"Mhn?!"

I said hello. At that moment, I saw Matsuzawa shudder and spring from the ground at least ten centimeters high. She really was a cute little girl!

"What a coincidence! Good morning!"

Wearing a beaming smile, I closed in on Matsuzawa from the side.

"G-good... good morning..."

A happy feeling accumulated in my chest. This was my first greeting with Matsuzawa! I didn't know why Komatsu circled round and round along the outside edge of the track, but I followed her and circled round and round. [\[13\]](#)

"Do you... always start running at this time?"

"Hh...? Mhn..."

"How... long... do you keep running laps...?"

"Until it's time..."

"What... what... time is that?"

"...about eight o'clock."

"I see..."

I see... eight o'clock? So we're still going to run for forty minutes? At this speed? Like this!? That's incredible!

But!

Thump, thump, thump, thump, thump... .. thump... .. thump

I can't do it.

"Hu-huff, huff, huffff....."

By the time I noticed, the distance from Matsuzawa's back was even further out of my reach.

In the end, my feet came to a stop, and I violently inhaled and exhaled. I almost died! While I stood there stupidly out of breath, I thoroughly began to understand what a hopeless gap there was between our physical abilities.

Ah... m-my eyes are getting blurry.

"You didn't have a chance. She's a track and field club member, after all... for someone one-hundred percent in the Go-Home Club^[14] like you, you'd have to train a hundred years before you got close!"

This was really pitiful, but when I was about to quietly slip into the classroom, I got anemic. Finally, the student prefect had to send me to the infirmary.

Trying to avoid Matsuzawa's eyes, I returned to the classroom. The first class was almost about to begin. At that moment, Takaura presented a huge package in front of me.

"I had foreseen this would happen! So, here, take it. I'm counting on you!"

"What is this?"

"Something I got from my dad's study. Anyway, no one's using it, so I'll lend it to you! Mhm, good luck! I'm cheering for you. I've really start to hope more and more from the bottom of my heart, that you'll end up together with Matsuzawa—it'll be a good laugh!

Takaura.

I love you.

"Hmfph! Hmfph! Hmfph!" ^[15]

Just for you!

Matsuzawa and I will become sweethearts that will spread therapeutic

laughter to humans, just for you to see!

"Hmfph! Hmfph! Hmfph!"

"Hey!! Yukisada, my dictionary... What are you doing?"

Yo! Brother! You're looking for a dictionary today too? Just go buy another!

"When you see it, you should know what it is. Hmfph! Hmfph! Hmfph!"

"I'm asking you because I don't know..."

"You intend to apply to one of the world-renown Former Imperial Universities^[16], but you don't even know this? I really admire a kamikaze pilot^[17] like you. I'm tell you, this is an exercise board!^[18]

"I wasn't asking you that... Could it be, that you're exercising?"

"Yes!"

I spread out my legs as if squatting in horse-stance, waved a snowboard-like plank at my brother in tiger-style, and smiled.^[19]

"I heard people say that doing this exercise for five minutes is equivalent to doing a hundred sit-ups! Hmfph! Hmfph! Hmfph!"

"Aren't you going to be taking exams soon? Go study..."

"I don't have that much free time! If you want to know why, it's because this is the crucial moment that will determine my future in a lifetime of love! I have this feeling!"

"That's because... you... just want to avoid studying for exams!"

"Who cares! Hmfph! Hmfph! Hmfph!"

"Well, do what you want... we're having sukiyaki for dinner, so you better hurry down. Takayuki's been in position since ages ago, so if you're not careful he'll eat everything spotless!"

"Did you say sukiyaki? Yesssss! Let's go eat!"

I threw the exercise board to the side, and wiped the sweat from my forehead. I'll continue my efforts after eating my fill.

"Yo, Matsuzawa! See you tomorrow!"—just like the first time I said hello to

her, Matsuzawa had reacted with a "Mhn?!" and jumped ten centimeters from the ground. You know, I was doing all this exercise for her.

In other words—

I failed yesterday because I couldn't catch up to Matsuzawa. Just that!

"I'll just get there early and wait for her."

The time was half past six o'clock.

I had changed into gym clothes, and was sitting on the stairs of the athletic complex entrance waiting for Matsuzawa.

If there was a more meaningful way to spend this time, it wouldn't be so hard to get up early. But the the period we spent running was my only opportunity to hear Matsuzawa's voice.

Even if I wanted to talk to her in the classroom, Matsuzawa would always be too shy and escape like a fish slipping away. Saying an awkward, surprised hello was her limit. Basically, the time we spent running in the morning was very valuable, because Matsuzawa had no place to run away to. This makes me sound like the bad guy, but I can't help it! I just want to talk to her!

There was only one thing that worried me. Would she give up coming to morning runs because of me? Judging from her attitude yesterday, I couldn't confidently say she wouldn't. Even so, I didn't have any alternatives, so I intended to wait for her here in either case.

I leaned my chin on my knees, and looked towards the morning sky.

The midsummer morning sun was already shining, forewarning the torrid heat to come by midday. The crowd of cumulonimbus clouds could not be overlooked. Today, the weather would certainly be great.

"Mhn..."

Without warning, I heard an anguished sound from behind me. I immediately turned around and revealed the beaming smile that I had practiced. She had come, surely enough!

"Hey, you're late! Matsuzawa, I thought you weren't coming today!"

"W-Why...?"

Today, a few handfuls of Matsuzawa's hair were sticking up, probably flattened while she was sleeping. The hem of her sweatpants were slightly rolled up, vaguely revealing those slender ankles. Because she looked so cute, and her presence was so reassuring, I kept giggling incessantly.

"Did you forget? Yesterday, I said, 「See you tomorrow!」. By the way, your response was, 「Mhn」!"

"Hhn-hm..."

"What? Hey, aren't we gonna run? Why you are still dawdling along? Hurry up!"

"S-Stret-..."

"If we don't stretch first... then...?"

"Mmhn..."

This girl! I really didn't mean to steal her credit.

"As expected of Matsuzawa... I really admire your perceptiveness!"

"No..."

Noting my movements from the side, Matsuzawa nervously began to stretch her arms and legs. I imitated her motions, and started some "deep" stretches.

Such delicate and round knees! Her slender wrists looked like they might break from just a touch. Her ultra-white cheeks, huge eyes, etc... and her curved upper body. The collar to her T-shirt was slightly open, which made it seem like one *could* yet *couldn't* see inside. It really really really really bothered me.

"I'm going....."

Matsuzawa quickly broke into a run! Waaait, like this, coming here early would have been pointless. I followed suite and hurriedly started running.

"Is 「I'm going」 supposed to be some sort of joke? You shy girl!"

"....."

Today I also followed tightly behind her.

Maybe my muscles had already grown from all my training. Compared to yesterday, the running felt relatively easier.

"Today, will you tell me why you run every morning?"

Matsuzawa's eyebrows drooped like the kanji, 「八」^[20], and she tilted her head with a look of distress. But I wouldn't let go of her so easily. I repeatedly stared at the side of her face, 「Hmm?」 「Hmm?」, and did this annoyingly until she answered me. When we finally entered the second lap—

"There's not much to do at home..."

Just as I almost forgot what my question was, Masuzu finally answered me. So now was the time to give chase!

"Mhm, Mhm. So then? So then?"

"Eh..."

"So then what? Hm?"

"Mnn....."

"There's not much to do, so then what?"

I had to keep pursuing further! I wanted to enter the depths of her heart! Until she answered, I wouldn't let her go! As for what inspired me to do things to this extent... even I didn't know myself. But I won't stop. Matsuzawa was probably very bewildered right now. Only when we reached the third lap did she finally speak again.

"Because when I run... it eliminates the pressure... and my head... it naturally becomes blank..."

"Hahaha!"

I couldn't help but laugh cheerfully (athlete mode), even though I wasn't sure if Matsuzawa's shoulders were shaking because she was a little scared.

"Just like me... In order to relieve the pressure from running, I study really hard! Y-Yesterday, I actually studied... for four hours!"

This was the truth.

After I tossed away the exercise board, I was so tired that I basically wasn't human anymore. In the end, I finally staggered to my desk, and threw myself into the books. For someone like me who had a body made for the Go-Home Club, I really hated exercise—though, having said that, my grades weren't good at all.

"Huuff, ah, haaa... haa..."

"Tamura-kun....."

"Wh... what?"

"I'm just about finished warming up, so I'm going to start running. I'm probably too fast for beginners. To be honest, I think it'll be difficult for you."

"Hey."

Warm-up exercise?

About finished?

What did that mean?

It had taken all of my best effort to run like this.

For a moment I couldn't understand what Matsuzawa meant—but, in short, was she concerned about me?

Are you an angel who descended to Earth?

"Yesterday... you went to the infirmary, right? At this rate, that'll happen again..."

So that was it.

But, Angel Matsuzawa, even if you tell me those things now—

"It's... too... late..."

By now, you're—

I began to pant with unsightly gasps as I started to slowly fall behind. The sight of Matsuzawa's back became increasingly distant. My feet stopped listening to

me—they really were useless. Though honestly, after one day of training, I couldn't actually expect to see results in my muscles... right? And to begin with, what was the relationship between abdominal muscles and running? N-No, now was not the time to think about those things.

"If you stop right away, it'll hurt more... I think, it'll be better if you just slow down."

Matsuzawa came back to tell me. Even so, I still wanted to run next to her, and I wanted to work my hardest to catch up to her.

But, when the distance between the two of us reached about half the entire track, I gave up.

"Aaaghh, this... is good enough..."

After taking a deep breath, I slowed down the speed of my strides until my body felt relaxed. Finally, my breathing became more regular. Though, you couldn't quite call jogging at this speed actual running. Besides, Matsuzawa's back was growing even more distant.

But, I still felt good.

With the sky so blue, the wind blowing against my sweaty body felt very comfortable. Also, Matsuzawa and I were the only ones sharing this lonely track.

Ah, it felt so good—

Not bad at all.

Listening to Matsuzawa's footsteps, I finally caught her rhythm and ran at exactly half of her tempo. Although it was still rather challenging, I gradually began to acquire a constant pace... ah!

This was perfect.

When the time comes, Matsuzawa will slowly draw closer on the full circle and lap me again!

Part 3[\[edit\]](#)

When it was time for goodbye, I'd say "See you tomorrow!" When we met, I'd

say "You're late!".

A week passed like this, and eventually I started to say 「Mambo!」^[21] to match Matsuzawa's 「Mhn!？」.

As for the running, it was still the same.

We'd start running together, and not after long, I'd be left behind. Every time she passed me around the circle, I'd grasp at the opportunity to talk to her. Like, 「Yesterday's lunch was horrible」 「This morning a cat glared at me」 「What blood type are you?」.

「There's a scar on your elbow!」. And after that Matsuzawa would pass me, muttering 「Mhm」 「Eh」 「Ah」 in reply.

And as soon as it reached eight o'clock, we'd part ways at the athletic fields. Matsuzawa would disappear in the direction of the girl's locker room without a trace. Just like this, we gradually grew closer to each other.

Really...

Honestly, I felt there was something fishy. Something was fishy about this—!

As I thought blankly about this, I stared out the classroom window towards the sky. I figured Matsuzawa was probably rushing home right now.

It was half past four o'clock in the afternoon, and school had ended long ago.

The sky was still very bright, and the choruses of the Aburazemi cicadas^[22] emulated the grandeur of the Japanese style. It was about time for the Higurashi cicadas to appear, but it might have been too bright outside right now to hear them sing.

But, even so, he was late.

I had been waiting for Takaura, who was in a student council meeting for thirty minutes already. If I had known I was going to wait this long, I wouldn't have agreed so easily to wait for him.

I made a resolution. If another ten minutes passed without a trace of him, I'd go home first. These few days I had been waking up early every day, so I was really sleepy right now.

"Yawwwwwwnnnnnn..."

I gave a big yawn as I decided to go to sleep. I wiped the tears from my eyes, and lazily placed my hand on the table to cushion my chin.

But right when I did that—

Something like the sound of a shrill screech crashed open the door with a 「bang」.

"That—that scared me to death?! What's going on? Something terrible?"

"Extremely—terrible! Does that girl have something wrong with her brain?"

"That [\[1\]](#) behavior of hers is scary enough!"

This was a group of girls that were considered some of the noisy ones in class. I shrugged my shoulders with disdain. Really... couldn't they learn from Matsuzawa a little bit?

"Oh, it's Tamura!"

"Mhn?"

After being pointed out so suddenly, I acted like Matsuzawa and jumped ten centimeters into the air with a low cry.

"Heyyy you. You've been rather close to Matsuzawa lately, right? "

Before I knew it, I was completely surrounded by these three girls. The strong stench of their perfume made me want to throw up. This was a nuisance! A nuisance!

"What's wrong with being with Matsuzawa?! Stop being jealous!"

"Eh, what are you talking about?! Don't badmouth us!"

"Fine by me. I'm saying, why don't you ask Matsuzawa herself? Ask her why she isn't applying for high school!"

"She has the brains too! I just don't get what she's thinking? Is her family really poor?"

As for me—

"Hn?"

I did it like Matsuzawa again.

Because of the strong odor of the perfume, my ability to think logically was impaired. The same line kept circling in my head.

Not going... to apply for high school—who was this?

Matsuzawa.

“This...”

My tongue refused to listen to me. I stopped completely. I re-begun my sentence.

“How is that possible... doesn’t Matsuzawa often get the highest scores in the entire grade? Even if her family were dirt poor, with scholarships, she could go anywhere!”

What was with...

What was with this girl talking rubbish. And, what did I say after that?

“Hmph—looks like Tamura didn’t know. Matsuzawa... she made a huge scene about not applying to high school. We were passing by the staff office, so we happened to hear it. It nearly scared us to death. The teacher was completely out of control, and the two of them were having a huge fight. We could hear them from miles away!”

“What did she say? Something along the lines of, 「tests and high school have nothing to do with me, I don’t want any of it!」...”

“The atmosphere was really horrible...”

“It was dreadful. Matsuzawa shouting like that... it was my first time seeing that. It almost looked like she was about to cry. So horrible—”

“I’m not sure if she said something weird like 「return to my home planet」 again. She’s at this age, and she’s still blurting out things like that. Don’t you think that’s dreadful?”

I was speechless.

My mind was in complete chaos, and I couldn’t move an inch. I only listened to their words. My brain seemed like it was paralyzed, and I found it extremely

difficult to understand what these people were saying.

They said there was a “fight”?

Matsuzawa? Had a fight with the teacher?

Shouting... and even cried?

“Is what you say... actually true...?”

As I asked this, thoughts flew wildly around my heart. How this was possible? How could “that” quiet Matsuzawa do something like this?

If that was true, didn’t that mean—?

“Just tell me—you—was it real?”

“I don’t know why—when we’re talking about Matsuzawa, it’s not enough to describe her as weird. She manages to get things to such a disagreeable state.”

So if that was the case—from Matsuzawa’s perspective, wasn’t she in really really really really dreadful trouble?

I finally understood. And at that instant—

By reflex, I instinctively started moving. They said it was at the staff room! I burst out of the classroom without even turning my head back.

Just fifteen minutes ago, we had said “goodbye” just like usual. When she heard my voice coming from behind her, Matsuzawa had held her breath and returned a 「Mhn」. To go along with her, I half-jokingly replied, 「Mambo」. Matsuzawa looked completely distressed, and left the classroom as if fleeing. I had thought she was already on her way home.

Why was Matsuzawa having a fight in the staff office... with the teacher? There was my first question too: why didn’t she want to apply to high school?

What was going on?

“Ah!”

I didn’t know whether to call this good timing or bad timing—

On the stairs of the hallway, Matsuzawa had just appeared at the corner of the staircase. We were about to run head-on into each other because Matsuzawa

happened to be coming down the stairs.

But when I saw Matsuzawa, I unexpectedly couldn't force any words out. That was because Matsuzawa was crying.

She was emotionally unstable. Both of her cheeks were red, her hair was a mess, her mouth was distorted, and clumps of tears were pouring from her eyes.

Even the way she breathed, I couldn't forget it.

"Matsuzawa! You! How long do you intend to keep doing this—"

The person who rushed out with his slippers pitter-pattering on the floor was the teacher. He had probably chased Matsuzawa the entire way.

"Tamura... aren't you in the Go-Home Club? Go home already! Did you hear me!?"

Matsuzawa looked at me with dismay, as if she were being judged. She gave hoarse, rasping noises that seemed to come from the depths of her throat, as she choked on her sobs.

This entire time, I wasn't able to move a step. I couldn't even breathe. All I could do was stare at Matsuzawa's face.

We stayed like this. For three whole seconds.

But then the deathly silence was hewn apart. With her face lowered, Matsuzawa pushed me aside and escaped in a burst of energy. In a flash, she disappeared down the stairs without a trace. It happened so fast, even lighting couldn't compare in terms of speed.

The teacher followed suite, and I was the only one left standing there like an idiot, blankly protruding there from the ground like a pole.

Just like an idiot.

That scene, was something I was not supposed to see—

Without even changing my uniform, I collapsed on my bed. It had already been two hours. I stared at the ceiling and didn't move a muscle, just like a dead person.

I had been thinking ever since then.

At the same time, I had been regretting everything.

When I had rushed to Matsuzawa's side, did I *think* I could do something for her? Or did I merely *want* to do something for her?

If I had done something then, all I did was stare at Matsuzawa's crying face. Stare. That's all. And I probably hurt her too! Just by using my own two eyes.

In this world, there aren't many people who want to be seen in that state.

But I had bluntly charged in there with all my clothes, and I just stood there like a pole... in the very end. After that, I fled from the scene like I was running away, grabbed my bag, and flew home.

"Uwuuuuughh..."

I couldn't bear it.

I couldn't bear my own powerlessness.

I couldn't bear how tormented my heart felt, and I clutched my head and buried myself under my sheets. Under a complete cover of darkness, I bawled sobs nonstop.

I couldn't erase from my memory the way Matsuzawa had looked at me then. Her creased eyebrows, distorted mouth, and reddened cheeks streaked with tears!

I couldn't call it anything close to cute. It looked something like a demon's [\[23\]](#) child. Just looking at her face delivered deep spasms of pain to the heart.

It wasn't something she wanted to show me.

To Matsuzawa, I definitely was not a person she wanted to show that face to. Definitely not!

"Uwuuuuughh..."

I didn't know what to do. All I did was burry myself deeper into my blanket. With my body curled up, I clutched at my head. From the depths of my abdomen, bitter and pained feelings difficult to describe with words welled up to my throat. I only continuously sobbed, moaning incessantly.

And then—

I didn't care how the evening passed. The next day came on its own.

Early in the morning.

The sky at six thirty in the morning was clear and cloudless.

I sat at the steps that I normally sat at, and looked up towards the sky as usual. I was waiting for Matsuzawa to come. After I tied my shoes, everything I needed to run was ready.

In the end, this was all I could do.

This was the conclusion I arrived at after I spent an entire night moaning, distressed, and reflecting about this.

Although I was afraid of seeing Matsuzawa, I thought about what I'd do if she never came in the mornings again. I also thought about the inverse—if I stopped showing up, Matsuzawa would probably not care so much. But thinking about that made me utterly afraid. I didn't want to become "that kind of person". But I also didn't want to become the other kind of guy who casually said goodbye one day, and then never appeared again. Because if I ran away like that, I'd have to spend the rest of my life avoiding Matsuzawa. In Matsuzawa's eyes, I'd look like some kid who gave up just when things started getting difficult.

So I decided—

"If you have the guts, then come, Matsuzawa...!"

As I looked up towards the bright sky, I patted my cheeks. Today, the wind was rather strong, and the clouds in the sky moved very quickly, skirting across the pale blue sky.

I stared at the sky, and tightened my lips. I decided. I'd do it like usual and wait here. I would wait here for Matsuzawa.

It'd probably turn extremely awkward! I wouldn't know what to say and become speechless! But even so, I knew I had to sit here like this, waiting for that girl to arrive.

I had already resolved myself.

“Matsuzawa... if you don’t come in five minutes, I’m going to go pick you up!”

“Mhn...”

“Mambo...!”

I only noticed her after my lungs responded by reflex.

“Yo, you’re late!”

I firmly turned my head back, and threw everything I had into a beaming smile.

That girl was right there!

She was actually right there!

She was wearing the gym clothes I recognized, and her face looked exasperated as usual as she stood there. Her snow white face and silky drifting hair were the same as always.

How should I put it? I felt relieved. All the hundred anxieties I had brooded over disappeared instantly as soon as I saw Matsuzawa, almost like a joke.

Great.

In short, that was how I felt. Really great. To be able to see Matsuzawa’s usual peaceful face, it was great.

Afterwards, we peacefully finished the usual stretching exercises, we peacefully walked onto the track, and peacefully began to run at a leisurely pace, like always.

But then, suddenly it happened.

“Yesterday, I was startled.”

“!?”

My heart seized for a moment.

Matsuzawa was talking to me as we ran. On a normal day, she would have silently accelerated, and left me behind not after long!

“Eh? Um... that’s no surprise...”

I was honestly shocked. I was acting like Matsuzawa in front of Matsuzawa.

“Tamura-kun... was startled, right? To see my tear-stricken face...”

“You’re talking about me?”

“*Ponder*” Matsuzawa nodded. When she continued on, her voice was absolutely tiny.

“So... I thought you wouldn’t be coming anymore...”

With the movement of the wind, the tail end of her sentence disintegrated into the air. I strained to listen to her, but I couldn’t pick up a trace of her words.

But, Matsuzawa momentarily sank into silence. She only continued with her slow-moving run, side-by-side next to me. This was first time Matsuzawa took the initiative to talk to me. I knew this at the very least.

“I’m sorry...”

I decided I definitely wouldn’t run away.

“Yesterday, I heard some of your private information. To put it together... I heard about you not wanting to apply to high school, and how you got into a fight. I’m sorry...!”

I tried to answer Matsuzawa as honestly and sincerely as possible. This was Matsuzawa's first time starting the conversation with me, so I wanted to use my truest and most honest self to speak with her. I omitted all the excuses and justifications. It took a great deal of difficulty to squeeze these few words out.

Matsuzawa stayed silent for quite a bit.

Huff, huff, huff. Only the sounds of regular breathing persisted for a while. But not long afterwards:

“I think, you didn’t need to apologize...”

Her almost flat voice dissolved in the wind. She continued:

“But, that... there are some discrepancies.”

After she said that line, Matsuzawa went silent again.

I hesitated for a moment—but then I opened my mouth.

“So what was the truth? Can I ask that...?”

I didn't know many times we exhaled and inhaled between us.

But in the end, she began. “It was like this...”

And that girl continued to speak.

“I'm actually an alien!”

She actually said it...

“The planet I grew up on was actually the moon. I should be going back soon, so it's almost time for me to give up my life on earth. So it's not that I hate exams. It's more like there's no reason for me to take them.”

She actually said it. Like this, Matsuzawa was going to take the escape route. She was going to shut the door, and lock me outside even though I was eagerly trying to reach out to her.

To be honest, from the very beginning, I thought this girl's incomprehensible behavior had some charm. It had aroused my feelings, and it had caused me to think she was an interesting girl.

But.

“You...”

I tried to keep my level head, and calmly said the words that were sitting in my heart.

“Other people are trying their best to talk to you. I don't think it's fair of you to keep wearing that attitude!”

It really made me worried... I had moaned and wallowed in depression for an entire night thinking about Matsuzawa's problem.

But to be brushed off with this talk about being an alien, how was I supposed to be happy?

Of course, I'll end up reaping what I sow, upset. It's not like Matsuzawa asked me to do this. But from the very beginning, I had been worrying about her

without her permission. Still, I definitely didn't want Matsuzawa to think it was all her fault.

But, a sincere desire had evolved from the bottom of my heart to confront Matsuzawa, face to face.

And I received the reply that she was actually an alien.

Wasn't that too unfair? How could she say something like that—?

"Tamura-kun, listen to me..."

Matsuzawa slowly turned her face towards me. With her eyes that seemed crystal-clear to its depths, she gazed at me intently.

"I don't want you to get serious with my personal problems..."

Her throat choked up.

And then—

"It won't be long before I return to the moon. When that happens, no matter what you do, my memories on this earth will completely fade away. Even my memories of Tamura-kun. Because of that, I don't want you to get involved..."

And then...

I didn't hear what she said next.

Because I already stopped in my tracks.

Matsuzawa noticed that I had stopped moving, so she also slowed down and looked back at me.

I guess my facial expression must have been very strange.

In that instant, my thumping and still-glowing heart seemed to freeze. It froze over, stiffened, and shriveled up into a small ball. The pain simply cracked it open.

Just like that, I turned my back away from Matsuzawa.

It be more accurate, it was more like my entire body was chilled to its depths.

I walked off the track.

My body perfectly straight, I left the athletic complex and headed for the

stairs.



I only looked back once.

Matsuzawa was still standing there, watching me.

I immediately turned my back away from her.

I felt completely ashamed.

And I felt filled with regret—

The person who was supposed to be serious was me!

I was seriously worried, seriously thinking about it... I was like an idiot. This was exactly how one obtains the worst of everything!

It was enough!

Enough.

At the vacant entrance to the stairs, I brushed the dirt off of my sneakers, and the particles of dust from the athletic fields came drifting off.

I just wanted to talk to that girl. So I did try my best to tell her, but in the end I was shoved back. That was all that happened. It was nothing better, and it was nothing worse. You couldn't even call it being dumped, because Matsuzawa

never gave me an opportunity to like her.

I really was an idiot! I was so pleased with myself, yet I made a scene, and relied on my wishful thinking... I got serious...

I shouldn't have been worried in the first place. No. From the very beginning, there was no reason for me to rush to that girl's side. I couldn't help her in either case.

Honestly, what did I do? What was I so flustered about? I probably looked very ridiculous like this after giving Matsuzawa so much trouble. I wanted to disappear from Matsuzawa's eyes, right away... I wanted to disappear.

"Eh? You didn't do it today? Go running and talking with Matsuzawa?"

"..."

"You know, I feel like Matsuzawa's been looking at you."

"..."

"Tamura, hey—what's with you?"

"Tomorrow I'm going to return that to you... that thing."

"Huh?"

"I'll bring it back for you. Do you mind if you bring me along so I can say thank you to your dad?"

"Oh, that's not a problem... though, honestly, what's with you? Are you already?"

"It doesn't matter..."

"Even if you say it doesn't matter... your face doesn't look like it's no big deal!"

"I really want to wear a rock hat right now..." [\[24\]](#)

"Huh?"

When I had finally come to my senses, there was only a week before it was time for final exams.

I had conveniently just stopped my stupid activities.

Not long afterwards, final exams were over—

Part 4[\[edit\]](#)

Air conditioning—

Shaved ice, fruit juice, popsicles, watermelon... fruit juice, shaved ice, fruit juice, watermelon, popsicles, fruit juice!

Air—Conditioning—!

If my life continued like this for another two weeks... what would happen to me?

The correct answer is—

"Ughhhhhhh... I'm... going to get diarrhea..."

I slowly crawled forward as I pulled myself out of the steamy bathroom that was just like a sauna. The floor of the hallway seemed to be emitting an icy chill, and I couldn't help but collapse on the ground with no desire to get up.

"Ah! Really. Don't just lie there! We'll have guests over in the minute!"

Mom's slippers made squeaky noises as she walked past me.

"Guests?"

"Apparently it's Takayuki's girlfriend."

"W-What?"

I exerted my back muscles, and strived to pick up my head.

"Takayuki's... girlfriend?"

"Yes! That's why you shouldn't laze around there. Go back to your room!"

What was that supposed to mean? No, more importantly—

"Wait a minute. Isn't Takayuki in sixth grade? How does he have a girlfriend?"

"It seems like kids are maturing early these days. One really can't stand it, right?"

"I-Is that really so...?"

I had nothing to say. After losing like that, my willpower and strength to live on just collapsed onto the floor like big words.

Mom ignored me, who was collapsed on the side, as she busily cleaned up the kitchen, boldly unpacked and threw away the offerings from Chugen^[25], and took care of the [Soda](#) as she hummed a song.

"Hey..."

This wasn't interesting at all.

"Humm hum—should I put the flowers over here?"

This wasn't interesting at all.

"Hey! I still have diarrhea! I'm not interested in this kind of thing!"

"What? Who cares about you?"

"Huh?"

I was shocked. She actually said such mean things out loud. Was she really my mom?

"You're getting what you deserve! If you eat and drink like that every day just because it's summer vacation, of course you'll get an upset stomach! I've tried to stop you before! But aside from that, what's with all your fuss? Are you wasting your intelligence?"

"A-As the mother of three kids, how can you talk about wasting intelligence?"

"Well the sauce isn't bad!"

"Don't talk about the sauce!"

Before I knew it, I was filled with a flaming rage. I deliberately stomped up the stairs loudly and returned to my room on the second floor. Anyways, there was no reason to let guests encounter a premature kid like me. I'll just go hide in my room!

"Oh, Yukisada? Your older brother was asking if you saw his dictionary?"

"Just go buy him another other!"

I slammed the door shut with a bang. The wind chimes that hung down from

the door rang with lonely jingles.

"Honestly..."

When I entered my room, a gush of cold air vaporized the sweat that covered my body. By rule, I left the air conditioning on in my room all the time to preserve the cool temperature, even when I left my lair and had great formalities with other beings on the way to the bathroom.

I laid on my cool and refreshing bed and buried my head into my pillow. So, so comfortable! Summer vacation was the best! Even though I had diarrhea, summer vacation was the best season.

Well, that should have been the case...

But—

Why wasn't I happy at all?

"It's because I'm about to become an exam candidate..."

I half-answered myself. But, that should be entirely true. I felt unsatisfied, bored, and hollow inside... completely because I was about to become an exam candidate.

I glanced out the window, and saw that the midday sun had just passed its apex. The sun was currently roasting the asphalt with its fiendish broiling rays. Huge cumulonimbus clouds were surged and rolled up, unmoving as they hung from the sky. It was quite a picturesque midsummer sky. Hypothetically, if I opened the tightly shut window, the hysterical cries of Aburazemi cicadas would probably pour in! I thought about asking Takaura if he wanted to go together to somewhere like the manga shop, but in this weather, it was impossible gather up motivation to go out with anyone.

So because of that, the only thing there left to do was—

"Ah..."

I was already somewhat aware of the truth. Apart from sitting like an obedient exam candidate at my desk, I didn't have any other choices. I half rolled off of my bed, and with great difficulty dragged my lazy and heavily sagging body to the chair. I faced my desk, took out my half-completed mathematics workbook, and

began twirling my mechanical pencil with my fingers—but before long, I leaned my chin powerlessly against the workbook.

I felt that it was impossible to keep going like this. I understood very well this was the crucial moment; the fated momentous battle for victory that had been built up. The person who took control of summer took control of tests! So, now was about the time I should start seriously focusing on studying—

I got an idea.

To motivate myself, I could go gather some intelligence. If I got to know who my rivals were, I'd naturally be able to come up with countermeasures.

I started up the power core for my desktop computer, and tossed my mechanical pencil off to the side. I'd look for countermeasures of dealing with exams that have been tried in the past until today, and filter for information that met my requirements in order to get ideas. This was a legitimate way of preparing for exams... I think. I waited for the computer to boot up, and then pulled up a search engine on the web. My keyboard clicked with a series of tapping noises as I typed.

High school entrance exam... spacebar... public... enter... and there we go!

There were, woah, 49400 search results returned! There's no way I can look through all of this! I'll come back later to take a look at this! That being said—!

Right, there was that!

Since I turned on the computer already, I might as well try satisfying my other intellectual curiosities! That's a plan.

"Boobs... spacebar: ...sample images..."

En~ter.

"Woah... 225400 results... wow... w-wow.... this is..."

So this was the truth...

The first dynasty... rising disorder. Going to... Kamaura...

"Ah—"

When I came back to my senses, the scary thing was that twenty minutes had

already passed.

These curved and delicate bodies were so shocking they could deprive people of their sense of time... I wiped my forehead. At the moment, I had no patience for thinking about the merits and demerits of interactive media for studying, so I went back to surfing the net—

Tappings sounds came from my keyboard.

Without really thinking, my fingers moved on their own as they typed, distractedly smushing keys like I was a person talking on the phone while typing.

There was no real meaning to it.

I wasn't in the mood to do math. I wanted to keep playing on the internet a little more. Could you say this was me simply wanting to escape reality? Or was I killing time even though I was clearly very busy?

"Matsu - kawa - Komaki..."

I stopped.

Honestly, I didn't really mean anything in particular. Nothing at all.

"Huh?"

My heart leaped for a second.

In merely a split second, I felt my entire body go cold. Basically, I lost my color and went pale.

The familiar white search results screen was spread out with text. As I stared at the screen, I tried to keep my mind calm, but my body didn't listen at all.

What? What? I repeatedly kept muttering this to myself. What? What? What? What? What? Why—?

Thirteen results.

The text was blue, and the captions of the links displayed newspaper and tabloid websites I was very familiar with.

September 15th, 2001.

Dentist, Matsuzawa Hirotsugu (44). Dentist, Matsuzawa Yōko (43). Eldest son,

Matsuzawa Wajin (18). Received severe traumatic injuries all over their bodies. A curve in the road with poor visibility. Went over a cliff. Eldest daughter, Matsuzawa Komaki (12) is still undergoing treatment. A tragedy for a family of dentists.

I heard some incessant clicking noises, and only afterwards I realized that my finger on the mouse was trembling somewhat strangely. I told myself to stop and stop, but I couldn't control myself at all. "I don't understand, wait! I haven't read that part yet!" Even though I thought this was, my eyes continued to fly and sweep over all the text. I even tried to consider if this was a family of someone with the same name. But their ages were the identical, and I couldn't imagine there'd be two people in this world who would choose that kind of name.

But. But. But. It was an accident that resulted in death?

An entire family of three died, leaving behind Matsuzawa Komaki?

"Don't—"

Don't joke around. How could something like that actually happen?

Three years ago, she would have been in sixth grade. How is it possible that she lost her entire envelope of a family, and was forced to into loneliness all by herself...

I covered my mouth like a girl.

This, really happened—?

Was this really a truth that had been weighing on Matsuzawa?

I tried to imagine it, but I couldn't do it. The hairs on my body were standing on end, and I had already lost all my rationality.

"It's the same! It's the same as before, so give up on it!" I didn't know who said this. But I agreed that I should back off, because that girl had seriously told me that it wasn't my problem. Yet, was I going to repeat that entire thing again anyways? If I repeated it with the same actions, I'd only regret it in the end—

"Well, then I'll just regret it—"

My words blurted out.

These fierce feelings were similar anger.

My skin felt like it was peeling off as I stood up from my chair. I rummaged through the drawers, and pulled out an address book. The phone numbers were no good. I needed the address so I could memorize it. It wasn't far... I could do it.

I was trying my best.

I bounded down the stairs, and my sandals... I shouldn't wear them, they're no good! At that thought, I turned around and kicked off my sandals. I stuffed my feet into sneakers and crudely tied the laces.

I opened the front door and ran outside. The scorching sun under the sky was so bright that I could barely keep my eyes open. I used all my power to wildly sprint ahead. My skin felt slightly aggravated like it was being roasted in an oven, but I couldn't care about this kind of discomfort. I told my feet to run faster, faster, and even faster.

Please!

"Matsu... zawa...!"

I didn't know what I could do.

Maybe it would be better if I don't do anything.

But—

But, why?

Matsuzawa!

I can't restrain myself from going to see you! I can't control my desire to confirm your existence. I can't stop my legs from running. I don't care what you think about me, but I can't help but act this way.

Run, run, and run! I turned along a corner, and was headed towards a small townhouse. It was probably that one, but for some reason, I couldn't see very well. My steps staggered as I leaned against the wooden enclosure wall. I wanted to to confirm the name on the door plate, so I squinted my eyes and tried to examine it—

Just then—

"Mhn? Eh?"

The colorful scenery before me suddenly seemed to blur into sparkles. It started to twist, swirl, and then... it seemed like I was flying.

What happened?

The world just became a rollercoaster.

"He's really an idiot, an idiot!"

"Ah..."

"If he goes running in 36°C hot weather, anyone's body would suffer problems!" [\[26\]](#)

"Ah... I'll be sure to tell him that."

"In short, wait for his body temperature to come down, and make sure to rehydrate him. Afterwards, just let him rest in peace."

"Okay."

That was definitely Matsuzawa's voice—

Soon afterwards, a pure white face covered my blurry field of vision.

Huh? I mean... what happened, Matsuzawa?

Hey... I haven't seen you in a while. You've picked up some weight and fat...
Huh? H-H-How was that possible?!

"H-How sad! You've become bald!"

"Mhn..."

"Mambo!"

I extended my hands towards the sparkling smooth head, and exclaimed.

Then, a short period of silence followed.

"That's... not me!"

"You're awake?"

There were two voices that came from my left and right. It was like stereo

surround sound speakers. Matsuzawa's sound came from the right, and the other came from the left. The bald head was on the left, and the direction I had reached my hand towards was also the left. In other words, the baldy was not Matsuzawa.

"Oh... it's not you. That's great..."

I sighed with a lot of murmurs to myself. Then, who was the person on the left? The person with the shiny head and plump figure? White clothes, spectacles, stethoscope... I had a faint guess, but I wanted to confirm it first.

"Excuse me... who are you...?"

"I'm the doctor!"

I was right. The other thing I wanted to confirm—

"Is this... your house?"

"Mm." Matsuzawa nodded.

"When I was hanging up the laundry, I saw Tamura-kun running here from the balcony... I watched and watched, and then you fell. So I dragged you inside and called the doctor. The doctor said you nearly got heatstroke."

Heatstroke...

When I thought about how useless I was, I had nothing to say. No wonder why my head hurt like crazy. My kness also hurt a bit, and when pulled aside the comforter, I noticed there was a serious abrasion on my forehead. It looks like I literally was "dragged inside". But... what was this? There was a fairly sized bruise on my calf.

"Sorry! On the steps of the main entrance, I dropped you several times..."

Matsuzawa's eyebrows drooped like the kanji, "人", and she became silent. Don't worry about it, Matsuzawa... Seeing how I foolishly charged out my house just to end up falling on the side of the road, who knew how many types of an idiot I was? If you dropped me or threw me away, it wouldn't be a big deal...

"Did you bring your insurance card? If you didn't, we'll need to add some medical fees."

Resisting the urge to tunnel back into the blankets, I responded to the "shiny" doctor.

"I can bring my insurance card to pay it in full later..."

"I understand. Then, come to the Second Suzuki Hospital. Okay?"

"Okay... My name is Tamura Yukisada... Oh I wanted to ask her..... um, Matsuzawa!"

"Yes...?"

"May I use the bathroom in your house? I was very shocked when I thought you turned bald, so now my stomach is very upset!"

Terrible! Terrible! Terrible!

I struggled to stabilize my footsteps as I listlessly walked back from the toilet I borrowed. I actually stupidly fainted! Right in front of Matsuzawa's house. There has to be a limit to this kind of stupid coincidental occurrences.

As I advanced along the wall, my head continued to throb. Almost like was still being beat up in a fight, my vision was all blurry, swaying nonstop.

"Ah..."

Since my temples wouldn't stop hurting, I paused in the hallway for a little bit.

This was a quiet old building.

Because the hallway was constructed with wooden floors, each step caused creaky noises to sound. The entire of the house was very dimly lit, so earlier it wasn't entirely the fault of my eyes. The room that I had been resting in earlier was a type very rarely found nowadays, and the bathroom I just used was even more difficult. Very, very difficult. You could barely call this Western-style. The entire building was probably like this.

"Can you walk?"

When I heard a voice talking to me, I raised my head.

Matsuzawa was standing in the entrance to the room. For an instant, I thought she looked exceedingly like a beautiful snowy white woman. But when I looked carefully, she was actually just wearing a T-shirt top that could only be

described as "casual". For a bottom, she was wearing knee-length shorts that looked like they were used as pajamas. Basically, it was dressed like she didn't care... she probably didn't even feel self-conscious standing like that in front of a guy!

"Oh, I'm fine!"

As I responded, I walked back towards the room. Because I couldn't stand how my head hurt, I had no desire to show off, so I climbed back into the futon that had been prepared.

"The doctor already left. Come! Drink some of this!"

"Oh, that's a little much..."

Matsuzawa had carried over to me a super high-capacity plastic bottle that was filled with barley tea. It was so large in volume, it made me wonder if it was used to store petroleum.

"It's all for you. You can drink all of it."

"I really appreciate your intentions, but I don't think I can take all of that. My stomach can't take it. Sorry..."

"The doctor said you were an idiot."

"Rather than saying I was an idiot, it would have been better if he said I had diarrhea."

I used the cup Matsuzawa gave to me and drank some barley tea. Because my body was so dehydrated, in a flash I kept asking for refills. In one breath, I drained three cups.

"The doctor said... in this kind of weather, if you do things like this or that, you'll end up like this or that. So, you're an idiot."

"If you want to seriously convey the message, you need to be more specific..."

Ah, damn! Maybe it was because I refilled myself with too much water, but now my stomach... I had a bad feeling my stomach would start rumbling again, so I twisted around a little in the blankets. This time, however, my bad luck descended, and "puwuuu~" a noise came!

"Is this a coincidence?"

"Ah!" I jumped up.

"D-did you hear that? It just happened to sound like a fart! It's just a coincidence! My calves just rubbed against each other earlier, that's all!"

"I wasn't asking about that. Tamura-kun ended up in front of my house... was that coincidence?"

Suddenly, I couldn't even break a joke. I stiffly swallowed my words.

What should I say?

"I..."

Earlier, what I had I decided to do—?

"This isn't a coincidence... I was looking for you."

"Why...?"

"In short, I felt it was absolutely necessary to run over here... yeah, I..."

All of a sudden, I felt like my hazy vision cleared up. Why did I come to see Matsuzawa? As I asked myself this, I quickly remembered everything.

The reason why I decided to run over here, and the reason why I was so anxious.

"I... probably... wanted to run to the side of you three years ago."

I noticed in that split second, Matsuzawa held her breath. Her slender shoulders began to tremble, and I couldn't bear to watch it. I figured she probably realized that I knew about that thing.

Was I cruel?

I probably wasn't considerate at all.

Despite this—

"I'm not saying I can do anything... but... when I accidentally found out about that incident earlier, I sprinted here with all my strength even though I knew there's no way I could return to "that time"... it looks like I've finally put that running training to use!"

"Didn't you faint?"

After she said this soft words, Matsuzawa slowly lowered her head. When she pushed some hair that slipped out of place behind her ear, I couldn't take my eyes off of her appearance.

With a slight pause, she subsequently opened her mouth quietly.

"One year ago, I was waiting for someone to save me..."

The report said it was some light flesh injuries, but—when sixth grade Matsuzawa was at "that time", she had flown out of the open car window and landed on the grass under the shade of a tree.

Then, right before her eyes, "everyone" in that car except for Matsuzawa Komaki shockingly tumbled down that slope, only to disappear into the unfathomable depths of the chasm floor.

When that one person was left on the side of the mountain road, it was already past ten o'clock at night. There was no way she had anything like a cellphone on her. She could only extend her five fingers, but not a single car passed.

In the end, until six o'clock in the morning when a farmer's truck passed by, Matsuzawa Komaki had waited there. She continuously cried out the names of her family members, and continuously waited for an unlikely reply. She feared the sounds of wild animals, and was afraid of the dark. She trembled ceaselessly, and had no where to go.

Eight hours.

Then, even after those nightmarish eight hours passed, it wasn't like the ordeal was over. In other words—

It would have been better if it was just a nightmare.

The instant Matsuzawa said those words, the cup slid from my shaking hands. Fortunately, I had already finished all the barley tea inside. However, the simple act of picking it up couldn't process in my mind, so in the end Matsuzawa picked it up for me.

"My home is very quiet... there's only me and my grandmother who adopted

me living here. However, recently my grandmother's been admitted to the hospital... so now it's only me."

Was it a subconscious action? Matsuzawa's fingers were tightly gripping a corner of the cup, and they seemed like they were turning white and discolored. I silently looked at her fingers.

"I told you this before... remember when I told you I didn't intend to apply for high school? That's because I don't want to increase the burden of money on my grandmother. Also... I have no desire to continue living an ordinary life. Like going to school and making friends, I've had enough of that. Once I'm finished with compulsory education, I want to live a quiet life and make just enough money to cover living expenses. I'll take care of my grandmother, and then live peacefully... that's what I want..."

What could I say in response to that?

Right now. What could I say on behalf of Matsuzawa?

Before I could even get a grasp of everything, Matsuzawa suddenly raised her head.

"Is Tamura-kun... someone who has dreams?"

I had no idea how to respond. But Matsuzawa seemed to assume so, and she nodded.

"Around this time last year, I dreamed about my mom, dad, and brother... a dream that they were all living on the moon. There was a house that was covered with a triangular roof, an arched floor, and shined with brilliant yellow rays. Everyone was living there."

A faint smile emerged unquestionably from her lips.

"Everyone was very energetic, and waved at me. I don't care if you want to laugh... but I'm convinced that's telepathy they've sent to me. I believe they wanted to tell me: "We're here! We'll be here waiting for you!" Since then, I've firmly believed that the final home I'll return to is on the moon. I'm convinced that one day, I'll forget all the memories I have here, happy or sad, and I'll return to that place."

Her fragile mouth still maintained that smiling shape, unmoving from that position.

"If it wasn't like that... then I..."

Matsuzawa suddenly stopped talking. True serenity descended on the sun-faded old-fashioned tatami mat.

I kept the silence, but I couldn't stop thinking—

If it wasn't like that... then I...

What would Matsuzawa become?

"Ah—it's you, Yukisada. Where did you go? Come eat! Hurry up and sit down! Dad, how many bottles of beer should I take out."

"Just start with one! And bring cups too while you're at it! Also, did you want to drink?"

"I'll be studying later, so I won't drink. Ah! Takayuki! Why are you sneakily snatching food with your hands?"

"H-H-Hey! Agh! I spent the entire day today listening to a girl's nagging, I'm exhausted! And I'm hungry to death!"

"Huh? That girl... what's her name again? Yuri? You guys ate quite a bit, right? Oh and Yukisada, this kid's girlfriend ended up eating all your leftover ice! It was very frightening."

"Ah, Yuki nii-san, can you pass the mayonnaise from over there—?"

"Will Yukisada drink with me? Hah, will you share a drink with me tonight? Your dad is going to be lonely!"

"Oh yeah, oh yeah. Hey, have you seen my dictionary? I've looked for it for half a day and I haven't found it."

Yukisada. You. Hey, you. Yuki nii-san...

I used to take for granted hearing my name called out like this—

"Brother? What's up?"

I never imagined what it would be like for it all to disappear.

I had always taken it for granted.

I assumed it would always be right here.

"Sniff... sniff..."

I sprawled out over the dining table—

"Huh, Yukisada? What's wrong?"

"What's... wrong with you? Did something happen?"

"Ugh, this is so troublesome. What's with you, Yukisada!?"

"As a man, there are times when you can't hold back your tears! Come. Let's drink together! Ha, tonight your dad will listen until you've had enough. Come on...!"

My tears, they won't stop coming.

What was Matsuzawa doing right now?

How lonely was it with her family passed away?

To be at home all alone, to be all alone in the world, and have to eat dinner just like this?

Could she laugh from joy?

Was she happy?

Waiting for the day she goes back to the moon?

Always waiting for the day she forget about everything that happened on earth?

Obviously when I thought about this, I couldn't help but feel the tears coming. I couldn't control myself.

In her world, was there nothing but sorrowful things—?

"Ah! Yukisada?"

Just like that, I lost control.

Slowly, slowly, I collapsed to the side.

Part 5[\[edit\]](#)

A huge full moon hung from high in the sky—

Under the pale white beams cast down: there was a meadow.

Matsuzawa really was cute.

She was wearing gym clothes as always, with a pair of rabbit ears and a fluffy tail, jumping and running with leaps and bounds.

I chased behind her, asking questions as I ran.

"Hey—Matsuzuawa! Where are you running off to?"

Matsuzawa hopped as she responded:

"I'm going home. Everyone's waiting for me."

The tip of her finger pointed to the round moon that hung from the sky.

I was beyond shocked. She's such a fool!

How did she plan to get back to the moon, anyways? She obviously didn't have wings or a rocket. Matsuzawa didn't even consider this as she just single-mindedly kept running forward, firmly believing she'd reach the moon one day.

Unable to keep going myself, I hollered out to her.

"You should give up! You can't fly!"

But Matsuzawa didn't stop. I only had a vivid premonition that if she kept on running like that, that girl would fall off the other side of the earth.

She couldn't keep running like that. But, Matsuzawa never listened.

Those long pairs of ears never heard my voice.

I wanted to save her!

How could I do it?

I need to think.

What could I do to save this girl? What could I do to convince that girl to stay here? What could I do to make that girl stop running for me?

What could I do?

"I know—"

I suddenly snapped open my eyes, and leaped out of my bed.

As the last syllable of my cry stayed suspended, my heart seemed to contract as it thumped while the blood flow slowed.

I looked at the time, and it was seven o'clock in the morning.

A warm breeze blew in through the open window, carrying the early morning chorus of cicadas. I broke out in sweat, and my body was soaked.

It happened on that morning.

I didn't know it was an illness from the heatstroke, but I slept in a coma like I was dead. After two days passed, on that morning—

I finally realized something.

"Hey, is your body alright? Where are you going?"

When I was putting on shoes at the entrance, Mom caught up with her pattering footsteps. She insisted that I wear a hat, but I said I wouldn't agree no matter way, and gave a crafty smile.

"This is a life or death matter!"

"Really... you're not in good shape at all!"

I know I'm not in good shape!

I pushed the door open, and leaped across the stairs that extended in front of the entrance in one jump. In the instant I landed on the asphalt road hot from the sunray, it was like being burned on a red-hot surface. However, my legs did not hesitate the slightest bit.

I still remembered the directions.

First I had to go straight for a little, and then turn left after the wine store. After that, I had to cut through the park with the cats, follow along the wall to of elementary school, and walk to a slightly wider road—

"Ah!"

It was probably across the street, and then a right turn—

I unexpectedly ran into that girl!

That girl was simply like a miracle as she stood there.

She was on the other side of a two-lane roadway, wearing a white western-style dress that seemed to waver in unusual heat. It nearly looked like she was steam evaporating from heat. I recklessly almost wanted to cross the street, but it was a red light, and the traffic wouldn't stop moving—

"Matsuzawa!"

Apart from calling to her from across the street, I had no other ideas.

I don't know if she heard me, but Matsuzawa opened her eyes wide in surprise, and raised her face that was reddened from being steamed in the heat.

Quite a lot of time passed, but the light didn't change, so I anxiously pulled my lungs open while we were separated by the roadway.

"Hey! Where are you going?"

Matsuzawa hesitated for a moment, and then replied to me at a volume I could hear her.

"I'm going to my grandmother's hospital! I called for a taxi, so it'll drive here soon!"

"I see! So... I guess there isn't much time then! I was planning to go to your house!"

"Why?"

I waited for a large rumbling truck to pass by, and the streetlight was still red.

"There's something I want to tell you! Even the little time before the taxi comes is fine too. Are you willing to listen right now?"

"Mm!"

It was so hot my vision almost seemed to blur. Matsuzawa's figure looked as if it was wavering, and as I opened my lungs, my voice came out a little strange.

Even so, it was still a red light at the moment. Despite this... right now, I

wanted to say it right now.

On the verge of exploding, I couldn't stop myself from shouting.

Because of the excessively dazzling hot light, Matsuzawa's eyes were squinted as I looked at her. Those were coffee-colored, crystal clear, and beautiful eyes.

I faced that pair of eyes, and I faced Matsuzawa.

"I - love - you!"

I said it.

"Hn?"

That girl gave a very obvious tremble, and jumped.

"Mambo!"

I finally understood!

Since the time I first spoke to her in the classroom, nearly a month had already passed.

I ran with her for a week, and avoided Matsuzawa after that. A second week passed. Since we never had the opportunity to meet during vacation, another two weeks passed. I was stupid for needing so much time...

Sometimes I was happy, and other times I felt hurt. It made my heart a huge mess. My body and mind nearly broke down from being repeatedly tossed around by sky-fluttering happiness and near-crushing pain.

Now, it was finally time!

"I..."

I said it.

It was from the bottom of my heart, and the depths of my body. In short, I used all of my strength to squeeze those few words out. I shuddered, and an unknown liquid like melted snow moistened by whole cheeks.

"I love you! As long as it'll make you happy, I'll do anything for you! I don't

mind if you want to return to the moon! As long as you feel happy, then it's okay! But, but that... also..."

Damn! I saw a taxi flashing a reserved sign driving in this direction. Like it wanted to break us apart, it cut straight through the road that separated the both of us.

As for Matsuzawa—

"Ah, mhn, hnnn..."

It looked like this was the limit. But never mind her, I was practically breaking down myself.

"Um, um... if you go back to the moon, I want you keep the "happy" memories you have from Earth! This is the only thing I can do! That's why, please tell me a way you won't forget those memories!

Just when I finished saying this, the taxi stopped in front of Matsuzawa. I secretly wished she would stay behind because of me, but that girl didn't even hesitate before she got on the car. So demoralizing!

The traffic light finally changed, and I rushed across without looking back. The taxi Matsuzawa called was still there. This is my last chance. The split second I drew close to the window—

"Use telepathy..."

Matsuzawa rolled down the window, revealing her soaked with perspiration and flushed face.

"I'm sure I'll receive some signals that will be really hard to forget!" <!--TLC check appreciated-->

I thought about how I should respond, but as I considered saying "Oh!" or "I'll leave it to you, you slowpoke!", the taxi drove away as I panted with big breaths...

As I turned and look around, the dazzling sun glared over the road. Just like this, I was left behind. There was no way I could confirm it with the lights around me.

"Huh...?"

I suddenly came to my senses, and my head was dizzy.

I was lying on the sofa in the living room—right, just before I died, I managed to struggle back home. Even though I went through a near-death experience, I didn't feel it until I turned on the air conditioning. When I was enjoying the cool air, I unintentionally fell asleep.

I wiped shameful globs of saliva from my mouth, and got up from the sofa. Without the television on, the living room was unusually quiet. I stretched my neck, and as I was wondering if anyone was home—

"You woke up! I need to go out, so please watch the house for me! Who knows if the phone will ring!"

My mother, who finally appeared, was collecting the things she needed. She grabbed her cellphone, and was about to go out the door."

"Where are you going?"

"Really!? You didn't hear me earlier? You're wasting all the effort I spent waking you up! It's a parent conference for your class!"

"Why... what's going on?"

"Apparently, one of the students had someone in their family pass away! We want to see how we can help out! If your older brother or Takayuki come home, tell them we'll cook dinner a little later today. If you need to, order some pizza to start!

I choked up emotionally soon afterwards, when I suddenly realized it might be...

This wasn't merely my intuition. It was closer to a precise premonition, and it nearly made me choke.

"Someone passed away... could that be...?"

"It's that Matsuzawa family! Ah! Really... what should we do? Her family is only composed of her grandmother and herself... it's too sad! Really..."

"I..."

By reflex, I blurted it out.

"I'm also going!"

"No!"

My mom refused resolutely!

"Even if you come, you're no use, right? You can't be any help! In these kinds of the times, only the people who can help should give their assistance!"

I sat on the sofa, and idly watched as my mom walked out.

But that being said, it made sense now.

If someone was merely going to visit the hospital, one wouldn't normally call the taxi!

In other words—that time, Matsuzawa was going to the hospital to say "farewell" to her grandmother!

Are you alright?

I only wanted to ask her that.

My hands shaking nonstop, I tried dialing the phone four times. I even ran straight to her house once.

But, I didn't hear Matsuzawa's voice even once. Like this, the entire day passed.

But today!

"Because it's summertime, they're hurrying up with the funeral!"—I didn't want to think about what that implied. But according to my mom, they also rushed the wake.

It was nearly dusk, and people were going out to the community activity center.

When we were little, my older brother, Takayuki, and I used to take a calligraphy class there for a period of time. Today, this familiar building was hung with funeral decorations. There was a black and white curtain called a Kujiramaku, and a slightly chilling breeze was mixed with the smell of burning

incense.

"Hey... Tamura-kun!"

The person who waved considerably from under the lantern was Takaura.

"Hey!"

I lifted my hand in response, but why did muscles in my cheek seem to emit some kind of chafing noise? I used my hand to cover my mouth, and conceal my face.

"The people you arrive need to add their names to guest book, and then line up to burn incense. Let's go!"

"Class prez... if you're going to go line up, not everyone in our class is here yet."

"Don't worry about it!"

I followed his striding steps towards the prepared table. With the most careful detail, I signed my name. The line for burning incense was divided into two rows, and we both line up at the end up opposite lines. Then, Takaura faintly spoke up.

"How should I put it...? Matsuzawa's come across such an unfortunate thing..."

I had no response, and only nodded my head.

Many of my classmates were also lined up in the procession, but not even half of them was chattering. Everyone more or less received a kind of shock.

This morning, everyone was informed about the wake through the class network. At the same time, it was also mentioned that Matsuzawa didn't have any other family, so they hoped the entire class could attend.

"What's she going to do from now on? That girl... you knew about her family situation from the beginning, right?"

"More or less..."

"Really? Since when?"

"Since I started liking her."

Takaura went quiet for a little bit.

"I see..."

In the end, that's all he said.

As such, we both simply sank into silence.

The line to burn incense smoothly moved forward, and before long I found the disagreeable picture of an old lady in front of me. She looked nothing like Matsuzawa. A white coffin was silently resting some distance in the back.

Imitating everyone else, I took a pinch of fine dust just like chili powder, brought it close to my forehead, and then placed it in the neighboring receptacle. I bowed my head in respect.

When I lifted my head, Matsuzawa was standing there.

Our eyes just happened to meet.

I wasn't sure if it was because she had been crying, or she had lacked sleep, but her eyes were red like a rabbit's.

"Matsu—!"

In that moment, everything that I wanted to say almost flooded out of my throat, but I closed my mouth tightly. Are you okay? How are you? Are you tired? Can I do anything for you? Don't hesitate to ask me, Matsuawa.

Matsuzawa...

"..."

I didn't know how to act, and I only stood there in silence. Even though Takaura patted my shoulders, I couldn't move at all.

I wanted to do something for her.

Even though I had no clue what I could do, I still wanted to do something for Matsuzawa. As long as I could let Matsuzawa feel a little bit of "happiness", I would do anything regardless of the cost to make it happen.

At that moment, tears started rolling from Matsuzawa's coffee colored eyes.

Before I could even think about it, my body already reacted. It's just that... I didn't act the right way.

The correct thing I should have done was gently hand over my handkerchief, and softly say, "Wipe it with this". But, instead, I fished out my handkerchief from my pocket and with my own hands, immediately wiped the snot that was about to drip down with her tears.

"Umwu..."

"Sor... sorry!"

Matsuzawa gave an incredibly perplexed look, and then abruptly grabbed the handkerchief that had been pressed on her her nose. Then, there came a sound.

- Sound-of-Nose-Blowing*

She really blew her nose very loudly.

"I'm shawrry.... shince earwier, I rweaawy wanted to mumblemumblemble..."

"I can't understand you..."

Matsuzawa blew in and out with her nose, straightened herself, and then continued!

"I'll return this..."

"You don't need to. I'll give it to you! I haven't gotten to that state."

"Mhm. Then I'll definitely return it to you after I wash it!"

Definitely.

We repeated this several times, and in the end, she took the handkerchief and put it in her pocket.

At that instant, I realized there was something strange!

To put it simply, why would she do things to that extent? It was only a handkerchief, so there was no reason for Matsuzawa to emphasize "definitely".

After I left the community activity center, the suspicious feeling died down. Only, Matsuzawa's voice continued to linger in my ears.

Sorry for coming back so late! We'll get started with dinner right away!

When I heard that voice, I realized how much time had flown by. As a member of the parent-teacher association, my mother had finally come home after helping out at the wake.

I wasn't hungry at all, and I ate my meal insipidly. Afterwards, crawled back to my own room.

Studying, television, music, and manga. Right now, I didn't couldn't concentrate on any of these.

As I laid on my bed staring at the ceiling, my mind started to drift in quite negative directions. In order to dispel these thoughts, I started imagining some happy things to cover up the pessimism, like... whether I should ask Matsuzawa to come to the beach, or whether I should invite her to come to the shrine festival, or even ask her to a study date at the library like a proper exam candidate... and study?

Right... what was Matsuzawa going to do about that? Was she going to take high school entrance exams?

...stop thinking about it! Stop, stop!

I suddenly buried my head in my pillow, and started again. Not this, not that, was there something... something happier—?

"Yukisada? Are you awake?"

The door suddenly opened.

As usual, my older brother stuck his head in without even knocking. There were a lot of things I wanted to complain about, but I didn't even have the energy to speak out to him right now. I only tunneled deeper in my blanket.

"I don't feel well, and I'm gonna go to bed. Turn off the lights please!"

I responded like that. But—

"Wait, don't go to sleep yet. There's a guest over!"

When I heard this unexpected line, I lifted my head.

"They're asking for me?"

"Her surname was Matsuzawa. That's the girl whom the wake was for today,

right? You should probably go down and see her."

"What?"

When I sprang up, my sheets also flew into the air.

I pushed aside my brother, careened down the stairs, and arrived at the front door in a flash (at least, it felt that way to me). Then, I saw her—

Matsuzawa was standing there.

She was wearing the same outfit that she was wearing several hours ago, and standing at the front porch of my house.

"Oh..... it's a beautiful night out tonight!"

After suppressing my anxiety in an instant, I tried to act calm as I raised my hand and gave a greeting.

"I must express my thanks that you came to a-a-attend the funeral today... that um..."

"If you don't know what to say, don't worry about it!"

Matsuzawa didn't speak. I didn't speak. Like this, how were we supposed to continue? Was I supposed to invite her inside? No, wait a moment! The wrinkled pajamas I took off are piled over there like a snakeskin. No! That's bad! While I was worrying myself over this—

"Really, really! Are you okay? Are you alright?"

My mother suddenly appeared.

"You must be exhausted! Are you hungry? Want to have a bite to eat? What do you want? Are onigiri okay? Mhm, then let's make a few onigiri! Takayuki! Can you check if there's any leftover rice?"

"No need, um... I'm just looking for Tamura-kun..."

"Uh—there's still about two bowls of rice left over... huh? Yuki's girlfriend? Woah! Nao, get over here! It's his girlfriend!"

"Um, I... that."

"Huh? She's your girlfriend? So you do have talents after all! I now see you in a

new light! Dad, come over here and look!"

"I'm looking for Tamura-kun..."

"Huh? What? Girlfriend? Yukisada's? Want to get a beer?"

Just shut up everyone—!

Speaking for Matsuzawa, she wasn't good at talking in the first place, and right now she must have been extremely exhausted. If I invited her inside, there's no way she'd be able to walk away alive.

"Why don't we chat outside? ...There's a park over there."

I slipped on my sandals, and urged Matsuzawa outside. Then—

"Watch your feet! Be careful of the steps!"

And just when I finished saying that—

"Bro!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

"?"

Slipping and shouting like a character from a manga, Takayuki tumbled down the stairs from my and Matsuzawa's side. Although it shocked us speechless, Takayuki seemed to magically land on the ground gracefully. How impressive! And then—

"Woah!! That gave me a shock! Here, here! It'll be boring if you don't take this with you!"

He held out his hand and displayed an ordinary supermarket plastic bag. I checked what was inside.

"Hey... Matsuzawa's in mourning right now! She's not going to be in the mood for that kind of thing!"

Entirely annoyed, I was about to give it back to him, but Matsuzawa glanced inside of the bag and let out an 「Ahh...」.

"Amazing..... I haven't played with one of these in years... wow..."

"Here! Take it!"

Using a motion like a bear scooping salmon out of the water, I passed the bag

that was about to give to Takayuki to Matsuzawa. I take back my words.

—Takayuki did a great job!

It was just like the moon that I saw in my dream, tenderly shining on this tiny playground. The breeze was unbelievably refreshing.

We occupied a corner near the water fountain, and took out the fireworks.

"Pick the one you like!"

I gave the entire bag to Matsuzawa.

These were the assorted fireworks leftover from Takayuki and his girlfriend's playing. He really was a considerate little brother, though, he didn't prepare a bucket to smother the fireworks, so you could see his adolescent rashness very well.

"Did you pick one?"

"Mmn!"

"Is there one you like?"

"Mmn!"

Unlike usual, Matsuzawa nodded very energetically.

"Then I'll... pick this one!"

Although Matsuzawa didn't mind herself, you couldn't change the fact she was still in mourning. Even as we laughed happily as we played with fireworks, there was still some worries weighing there. Yet when I took out the last sparkler we saved—in this quiet nighttime public park, silently watching that tiny fireball burning, there was some air of elegance to it.

"Well, let's light it!"

Sparkle.... Crackle... Rumblerumblerumblerumblewoosh "Matsuzawa....?"

"Hm?" *Swoooshbooommmm*

"What's that firework that gives off seven colors that you're holding?"

"Magnificent. Strike. Strong. Beautiful. Explosion. Dragon. Fire. That's what's

written on it!"

"Is it okay for you to hold it with your hands?"

My voice was smothered by the sounds of explosion.

It turned out Matsuzawa had a particular preference only for that kind of firework.

We squatted there side-by-side in the same posture people use for going to the bathroom [\[27\]](#), under the dissipating threads of smoke fireworks, playing with meaningless firecrackers, and using them all up.

Not after all, Matsuzawa looked like she sighed softly.

"Um... Tamura-kun..."

She spoke.

"What is it?"

"I almost forgot about this..."

Matsuzawa fished around her pocket, and pulled out a familiar-looking handkerchief.

"I'm really sorry I accidentally blew my nose on it today... I washed it and dried it as soon as I could... I came to return this to you."

I received it—

"Hey! This little thing!? You're so busy right now, you could have returned it anytime!"

Although I said this out loud, I couldn't help but reveal a smile from the corner of my mouth.

This was great!

Wiping her nose was a good decision! Even if it was a little reckless, I did profoundly feel that way about everything. Because now, I finally met Matsuzawa. Matsuzawa came to see me. We even went to go play with fireworks afterwards, alone in the in the park at night. I really wanted to shout out loud from joy: "Everyone look! It's really true, it's great!"

I stuffed the not fully dry handkerchief back into my pocket. But when I suddenly thought of something—

Enough though I felt this was great, I honestly felt something was off. Why was Matsuzawa is such a rush to do this? Why did she have to deliver this today at this time? I thought back to the funeral, when Matsuzawa insisted she would 'definitely' return it to me. I felt something was strange then, and even until now it echoed in my mind.

Based entirely on her usual behavior, it was honestly too unusual. What motivation couldn't be pushed off to the next day and would cause her to promise she would definitely do it?

"There's... something I just wanted to ask..."

It was a hoarse sound.

I shook my head, shaking away my imagination of what was going to happen, and forced myself to forget everything. Then I lifted my head.

The flame from the sparker that I held from my hand illuminated Matsuzawa's face. The orange light accented the soft and curved lines of the profile of her face, and it was extremely beautiful.

I watched a goddess as I waited for her to speak.

"The running..... why did you stop coming?"

"Ah... ouch!"

The glowing fire fell off the string.

As the ember fell, it grazed by the back of my hand. Perhaps, I thought to myself, it was because I burned myself, but a full two seconds passed where I couldn't move my body. I speechlessly had my mouth open.

"You're asking why... so you really don't understand..."

That day, on that morning—

To this, I haven't been able to forget the feels I had she she rejected me. The image of Matsuzawa's back when she rejected me.

"Although the tension is gone now... I think I vaguely understand what you

meant back then, now. But back then, after you said that during that situation, I honestly didn't know how I should face you!! D-Don't cry!"

Matsuzawa started crying.

She sat down on the ground, pulled her face towards her knees, and burst into tears. Damn! I made her cry! Were my words too hard on her?

No, but who said...

"I-I knew..."

Trying to suppress her breaths choked up with sobs, Matsuzawa spoke.

"To be honest, I also knew... because I said such strange things, and I didn't seriously respond to the things you said, I made you angry..."

"Matsuzawa..."

So Matsuzawa really did understand it. And then—

"I've... always regretted it. That day... that day I made you angry... I was actually very happy when Tamura-kun came. But I thought... I shouldn't... be happy like this, because I'd become afraid of losing it, so I thought it wasn't okay.... I rushed myself... and I said things like that... I really regretted it, so much..."

I gazed at Matsuzawa's trembling neck, and silently thought over this girl's words.

Shouldn't be happy.

Because I'd become afraid of losing it. So I thought it wasn't okay.

Did she just say that? —Just now, did she say such pitiful words?

"Th-those kinds of things..... if I had known earlier, then I should have never said it. After I said those things to you, I realized for the first time how painful a thing it was. If you had kept on coming... if the two of us... never had an argument, and kept meeting each other during summer break... ever since yesterday, I've been thinking about what it would have been like..."

So at that time, that's what Matsuzawa was thinking. If she started feeling happy from the meetings, she'd become afraid of losing it, so that's why she

rejected people—and in this case, that was me—who was still far far away.

In the end, I tried my best to forget about Matsuzawa's existence. I made my best ever not to go see her. When I finally understood Matsuzawa, three weeks had already passed.

Matsuzawa had felt regret for those three weeks. Now—

"You... told me—that you liked me, right?"

Now, she was sobbing relentlessly.

"Mm.... I said it."

"So, it wasn't a dream, right?"

"Of course it was real..."

"I'm really happy.... I really am... but...!"

She buried her face in her knees, and her frail back trembled.

It words that I could barely hear clearly, she shouted herself hoarse.

"It's too late... there's not enough time. Tamura-kun, you not only wanted to understand me, but you could you that love me... it might have be possible that we'd be able to start over... After today, we'd be able to go back to how we were. That's what I thought. It was about to start again after today, but it's already... impossible.

I silently listened as Matsuzawa kept repeating 'after today' and 'after today'—those were words that only Matsuzawa understood herself, as she repeatedly said everything was shattered.

"It's all... too late... because yesterday, everything changed..."

Matsuzawa sobbed loudly, and her voice and tears trickled down down and was sucked up by the ground.

"After all the difficulty, anticipating it for so long, that rare chance, and for that last summer break... and I ruined everything with my own hands... if I just didn't say that back then, at least we could have been together until yesterday."

"Hey, Matsuzawa... Matsu-chan."

I lightly touched Matsuzawa's back, and I felt a frighteningly hot temperature through her uniform. I patted her back, and prayed that her ragged breath would calm down.

"The things I'm hearing are causing my hair to stand on end... I'm getting a bad feeling about this..."

I desperately tried to keep my voice steady.

I was really scared.

After suddenly saying it was too late, that she ruined everything, and until yesterday—listening to Matsuzawa say things like this, I felt like I could link it together. These faintly uncomfortable pieces could all be linked together.

When I lent her my handkerchief, I had sensed something was off when she said she would 'definitely' return it. I wondered why she particularly had to come return it today... these clues revealed the answer in itself—

"I need to tell you..."

Matsuzawa slowly inhaled heavily, her nose sniffing, as she prepared herself to speak.

""As expected"" and ""Please wait"" were two thoughts sitting and swirling in my stomach.

I really wanted to shout, ""Stop!"" I didn't want to hear it! I didn't want to hear this kind of thing!

"Yesterday, my grandma passed away..... although the hospital informed me she was critically ill, this has actually happened several times already... so I was completely unprepared, when Grandma finally left me..."

Stop it! Don't say it, Matsuzawa! Stop!

"Before I went to the hospital, Tamura-kun, you said you loved me... you said you understood many things, but you still loved me anyways... so I thought we could make up to each other, and meet each other again. I originally wanted to properly apologize to you about that running incident... I've told you already, I've always regretted it so much, so I'll never say anything like that again. I thought about this in the taxi and I thought about the remainder of summer break... if we

could spend it together... but, when I got to the hospital... why did everything have to become like that...? Why doesn't it ever go right for me? Including up until now and those parts that were ruined, I wanted to start over so badly... from today on, I wanted to restart..."

Please, I begging you to stop. I already sensed it—

"Tamura-kun, to be honest..."

Straightening up and lifting her face drenched with tears and mucus, Matsuzawa looked at me. Her eyes red from crying reflected the wavering image of the moon, which was actually very beautiful, but—

"I'm going to move to a relative's house very far away. It's a very faraway place. Tomorrow, once the funeral is over, I'll be leaving."

Don't say it—

"So... goodbye!"

I grabbed her hand.

It was tiny, ice-cold hand.

"Tamura-kun..."

"Y-you said it wouldn't be easy, right... you said you wanted to start over after today right?"

My voice and body trembled very abnormally, but I couldn't blocks that were about to flood out.

"Are you just going to give up on it all? That future that you wanted to continue down after today.... all that effort to restart after today, is it going to disappear after we separate? Are you just going to say goodbye just like this? It's going to end like this?"

I was unable to look directly at Matsuzawa's face.

"If that's the case, I'm definitely not going to let go of your hand! I won't let you leave!"

If you take all that effort to restart after today, and disappear, I definitely won't let go of your hand! There's no way I'm letting go! I won't let you go!"

I grabbed Matsuzawa's hand, I and uselessly began to cry.

Who was the one who said Matsuzawa didn't have wings or a rocket, and it was impossible for her to return to the moon? In this sadness, she could only continue living on the earth. Although I wanted Matsuzawa to continue living on, I didn't want her to have that kind of "life" where she just breathed and ate. Rather, I wanted her to have a different life where there wouldn't have any memories she wanted to forget—"all that effort to restart after today". That was the only thing I hoped for. Even if she didn't have me at her side, I wanted her to keep living.

"You're such an idiot... even if we're apart, I definitely won't forget about you! And about 'all that effort to restart after today', it definitely won't end just like this!"

At this point I think I heard some faint voice.

It was a really tiny sound. First, it was "I see." And then it continued, "then, I also won't forget about you."

"Wuahhh....."

Just when I finally heard her clearly and grabbed the back of Matsuzawa's hand, I suddenly felt a prick and a soft sensation. My eyes opened wide with shock.

Just like a small animal, Matsuzawa licked the burn on the back of my hand where the ember from the sparkler fell, making me loosen my fingers.

Matsuzawa seized the opportunity and stood up, and nimbly escaped just like a rabbit. She ran away with her back towards me.

And then—

"Tamura-kun! I... know now! I just figured it out! I've decided!"

She looked back.

She still had that smile filling her face, smooth and soft. Honesty—who knew if Matsuzawa was actually a lively girl three years ago. I thought about this

unexpectedly calmly right now.



Matsuzawa placed her two hands on her head, just like two rabbit ears. She closed her eyes, and started mumbling some incomprehensible spell. Matsuzawa, what's with you? Are so exceedingly sad that you need to put on a teasing performance?

“Telepathy! Reception! Complete! Announcing the results!”

“That's... that's so sad!”

I started crying more miserably, but Matsuzawa still smiled happily.

“If I go back to the moon, I'll forget all of memories from earth! That's why...”

She stretched out the hands she had earlier placed on her head like rabbit ears. It was just like she wanted to embrace the moon in the sky.

“That's why, I still want to stay on the earth for a while! Even if I'm separated from Tamura-kun... I'll still try to do my best! From now, I'll live a happily after today! I won't forget! Those times when we went running, when you came to my house, when you said you love me, when we played with fireworks, and even

when I hurt you... I won't forget any of these! Thank you for bringing me so many memories! Thank you—! That day, it was really embarrassing, so this is to make up for it!”

She creased her brow, and hopped a few steps for me to see.

For those few moments, I held my breath.

It was like being shot through with an arrow. An overwhelming attack that scooped out a piece of my heart.

Even though this was probably effortless for her, I was completely fascinated by her in that split second.

It was so characteristic of Matsuzawa. It wasn't quite straightforward, but—
“Idi...”

There was no way I could restrain the shout that was coming out.

“Idiot—! I didn't think it was embarrassing at all—! Don't look down on me—!”

As I shouted, I thought it couldn't be...

Matsuzawa's family couldn't possibly be on the moon, right?

Because when Matsuzawa embraced the moonlight, it was so tender and dazzling. It was like the moon was giving off brilliant rays and showering Matsuzawa with love.

It illuminated Matsuzawa's path from the distant sky. And just with that wide smile, Matsuzawa waved and stepped away.

***[[edit](#)]

And just like that, the next day, Matsuzawa went to a faraway town.

When a record-breaking heatwave ended, I sent a letter to Matsuzawa (on that note, Matsuzawa forgot to send me her new address. I annoyed my homeroom teacher to death by asking for her address, she said I was just like a creepy stalker).

“You're too naive. Don't think it's over just like that. Everything will start again

after today, so remember it!” —when I told Takaura I wrote a letter like that, he told me it was ‘basically the same thing as a threat letter!’

“M-Matsuzawa.... why are you here?”

“Ah... I couldn’t help but run over here. I wanted to give this to you... this is a Christmas gift.”

Christmas eve.

She was waiting for me as I went home, my exclusive Santa Claus. Idiot! She actually tried to do this...

Wearing that Santa miniskirt outfit, her knees must have been freezing!

“M-Matsuzawa...! Why are you here?”

“Hehe... I couldn’t help but run over here. I wanted to give this to you... a New Year’s greeting card.”

New Years Eve, it was fifteen minutes before the new year.

My very own Benzaiten^[28] who came to visit me, giving out greetings for the new year. Idiot! She actually tried to do this...

You really should still be in mourning!

“M-Matsuzawa...! Why are you here?”

“Ah... I couldn’t help but run over here. I wanted to give you... this chocolate!”

Valentine’s Day Eve.

This girl who who smiled at a exam candidate like me, she was my personal master chef. Idiot! She actually tried to do this...

Those bandaids you have on your hands show how hard you worked to make these with your own hands.

Those events from above never happened. This is why once time passes, it never flows backwards—

“Ah.....”

I gave out an empty smile, and then blew my nose. Dreams are just like a stuffy nose. You give it a blow and it falls out! In a spurt of energy, I wiped under my nose, and threw it out on the plastic bag propped against the open drawer (a convenient place to collect booger tissues).

I gave a glance at the clock, and the hands were pointed at 11:50.”

Only ten minutes remained of today.

In other words, in ten minutes, this year’s Valentine’s Day Eve would be over, and Matsuzawa would lose the opportunity to become my very own master chef.

The high-school entrance exam that was the ‘day-after-tomorrow’ would soon become ‘tomorrow’s exam’,

“T-tomorrow...”

Suddenly, I became apprehensive, and my heart gave out an uncomfortable noise.

Earlier, I had been warned, “if you want to test into a public high school, you better know this problem book inside-out!” But, right now I still had an entire section of the book that I hadn’t studied yet.

I was also warned, “Don’t you dare become sick!” But my nose was giving out these slurpy noises. It was just like a swamp.

I also heard: “The most important thing is to take the exam calmly and steadily!” But right now, my entire body was trembling at the tempo of sixteenth notes.

In other words, I plainly wasn’t finished with my studying, yet I was like like this!!”

“Tomorrow!”

I was glued tightly to my desk, and my hands holding my mechanical pencil wobbled just like a newborn foal. Just in this quarter hour, I finally met this terrifying reality.

The entrance exam was going to start the day after tomorrow at nine o'clock in the morning. In other words, in 33 hours. This was all the time I had left. In front of me was a sea of incomprehensible English vocabulary and problems like magic spells!!

“Arghhh! I don’t want to want to take this exam! I don’t want to!”

Insane, I recklessly howled and violently kicked the backboard behind my desk.

How did that person in class say: “There isn’t a person in the world who studied for high school entrance exams serious! Don’t people just cram the night before the exam?!” To be completely fair, this was absolutely impossible! At least, I, Tamura Yukisada, am currently in the midst of being completely flustered.

In elementary school, I had a passion for insects, and my nickname was Insect Professor. When I entered middle school, I plunged headfirst into the world of history, subscribed to the magazine 《History Alley》 every year, and lived a plain unadorned life. Without other special interests, average grades, and an unremarkable appearance, I carried on with the unremarkable life of an ordinary person.

And finally it was time for this meager ordinary person to take entrance exams!

“Agh! So annoying, annoying—! I don’t want to take entrance exams—!”

I’ve probably become insane from being overly nervous!! No! That’s not it! I didn’t hesitate to slap myself on the face. Right now wasn’t the time to become frantic.

After all that struggle to get back to normal, I faintly gave a ‘humph’. I had to study! From now, every second was valuable, so I had to study!

Right! Now wasn’t the time to worry about Valentine’s Day. Entrance exams, entrance exams! Entrance exams are imminent!

There were 33 hours left.

“Ugu...”

Once I finally realized the heavy reality of how much time was left, my stomach started to burn. I unconsciously reached like a drowning person towards the

charm that hung from the my desk lamp. It was a gift to me from someone. The silk fabric surface that I held in my hand was embroidered with golden thread and the name of a famous national shrine.

“M-Matsuzawa...”

It was a cautious and softly reserved sound.

Matsuzawa!! Her name is Komaki.

She was a girl with wandering eyes, a denpa girl, emitting transparent odors. In my fantasies, she was sometimes Santa Claus, sometimes Benzaiten, and sometimes a master chef. She would be madly busy, but in reality, she was an alien (self-proclaimed) who came from the moon. What do you think? Dangerous?

Last summer, I liked my classmate Matsuzawa, and I personally went through a disquieting disturbance. But after Matsuzawa moved away, this disturbance died down. Up until now, our relationship has remained suspended in mid air without progress. Every month, we agreed to send each other one letter to demonstrate ‘we hadn’t forgotten the other’. This was our only interaction. Email? Phone? Matsuzawa and I both weren’t into that kind of thing.

Matsuzawa’s letter arrived this morning. Receiving this sudden present made my heart throb. When I opened it, there wasn’t a single sheet of paper inside. There was only this charm. Even though I wasn’t a firmly religious person, Matsuzawa was the best writer in our entire grade!

I figured there must be some sort of blessing from that thing, so I hung it in a place within sight.

“Matsuzawa-sama... even if it’s just for tomorrow, I hope your blessings with guide me...”

As I continually churned my thoughts of this unconventional thing in my heart, I slowly gave a long sigh.

Was Matsuzawa also holding a charm right now like this...? I tried letting myself soak up these sweet feelings. But moments later, I brought myself back—no, it’s impossible!

She was always an outstanding and smart girl. High school entrance exams are a piece of cake for that girl. Moreover, if she really wanted to rely on something, she would look up towards the moon in the sky, transmit radio waves, and do stuff like telepathy! Anyways, the moon is her home planet, and her whole family lives there.

As I imagined Matsuzawa's blank look as she stared up to the sky, I couldn't help but smile. When I came back to my senses, I my nervously was entirely gone. Perhaps this was an effect of the charm.

Maybe—

“Heh, it's snowing...”

I suddenly noticed the snowflakes fluttering in the air like dust, snowing since who knows when. In the darkness late at night, illuminated by street lamps, those care-free white flakes danced lightly in the wind.

I prayed the snow would stop before the day after tomorrow as I gazed at the charm in my hand.

No matter what kind of thing it was, as long as Matsuzawa sent it, I'd be happy. That was reality. To be honest, I've actually become quite dependent on it.

But. But. But...

There was one thing I needed to clarify.

This isn't chocolate!

Even though it's Valentine's Day, why is this a charm instead of chocolate? I know I already received something from someone, and I felt stupid for feeling disappointed. But. If someone is going to receive something from the girl they like on February 14th, of course all boys would look forward to chocolate! Even if I give up to that, at least make it a hand-knit scarf. 'I sent suddenly sent you a hand-made scarf, so I hope it isn't too serious for you? ...it also isn't made very well... I'm sorry for sending you this kind of gift...' 'Matsuzawa, you're so silly. If it's your hand-made scarf, I'd be willing to wrap myself with it.' 'Tamura-kun! Let's wrap both of us! Use that scarf and tightly wrap us together!'

Compared with chocolate, this one might actually be a little better, hmm?
...no, that wasn't the question—

I couldn't up but think of what Matsuzawa meant to me.

After my confession, I wasn't declined. Furthermore, we weren't going out. When we finally got to that point, we were separated by half of all the islands of Japan.

And if she was thinking about a person like me, this was a time when she'd want to cheer me on with my studies. It simply wasn't a time to send Valentines chocolates. I guess it must have been like that...?

Generally speaking, girls were like this. On February 14th, they would send chocolates to the boys they like. These activities were a great law determined by nature.

With this logic, you could come to a few possibilities: first, Matsuzawa wasn't a girl. Second, today is not actually February 14th. Third, maybe Matsuzawa didn't actually... how should I say this... didn't actually like me—

I forcefully shook my head so severely that my neck nearly broke. A slight dizziness cut off my train of thought. I took a few deep breaths, and I reached for the English vocabulary that escaped from my brain.

“Now isn't the time for this kind of thing!

I clutched my mechanical pencil again, and brought my gaze back to my notebook. I nearly got myself caught up in an endless self-questioning loop.

Until I finish my exams, I won't think about those complicated things. Maybe I even needed to continue using that black roasted coffee-colored drop, sometimes melt it, sometimes freeze it, and play with my strong odor.

In order to regain my enthusiasm, I wanted to let the draft in. I abruptly stood up from my seat, and after unlocking the window, I pulled it up. When I opened the window, the icy midwinter nighttime wind, so cold it hurt, poured inside. In an instant, the air I breathed out froze at the same time—

“Why won't you accept it!?”

That sudden voice made me jump unconsciously.

That shocked me. At this hour? Did something happen? By reflex, I hid behind the shadow of the curtains—it was a girl’s voice, but the sound volume wasn’t soft at all.

“Sensei! Please, I’m asking you. T-this is something I made after thinking about it a lot! If... if you’re not willing to take it, then I’m not going back!”

In this quiet neighborhood late at night, that uncontrolled excessive loudness echoed inconsiderately. I was already confused enough already. Now this had to strip away the remaining concentration I had left? By the gods what was this?

Jitteriness replaced my panic, and I tried to look out the window at our house’s front door.

“I said, Sensei!”

Standing there was a girl wearing a deep red overcoat with a hood. Without even an umbrella, she stood there with her waist-length hair dusted with snow, shouting nonstop in front of our front door.

And then on the other side of the door—

“If all I have to do is take it, and be over with it after that, I’d be happy to take it. However, you won’t accept that, right? So I’m sorry, no matter how stubborn you are, I can’t accept your gift. It’s already very late, so you should probably go home. Here, I’ll send you home!”

This was my 120 pound [\[29\]](#) older brother—Tamura Nao.

She called him “Sensei”. Was that girl in the red overcoat one of the homeschooled students he tutored? Ohh... in other words, that girl admired her senior private tutor and suddenly showed up at her Sensei’s house on Valentine’s Day. So that was what happened—such a disturbance for the neighbors!

“Who cares if he got chocolate or whatever... he should have just accepted it and let her go home already.”

What’s with saying, ‘Here, I’ll send you home?’

I looked down to watch my pigheaded older brother, and I couldn't help but feel an urge wanting to give him a thrashing. As things stood, what's the point of being reserved?

My older bro came home with two paper bags of chocolates this year. In other words, he was already corrupted! What's wrong with taking one or two more!?

By the way, my little brother Takayuki is also corrupted. Today, he stuffed the backpack he's had for six years overflowing with chocolates.

Huh? Is it only me?

I really am the only pure one! My chocolate count—zero. Ever since my birth, zero.

The eldest son is a 《popular》genius. The youngest is a 《popular》 athletic all-rounder. The middle son, me, is absolutely unremarkable. We are the three brothers from the Tamura family. What? It's pitiful, isn't it?

“Don't look at me so pitifully!”[\[30\]](#)

No, I am a pitiful person.

“I already said it, I don't want any sympathy! I want to go out with Sensei! Why won't Sensei consider it at all...? What part of me is no good?!”

It's because you're too noisy!

“Sensei, you idiot!”

Her voice, which raised an octave, was even less considerate of the noise and louder. It smashed the serenity of the night. I covered my ears, “Ugh”, and shook my head. It's more than I could bear!

I wanted to shout, ‘If you're going to fight, go somewhere else to fight!’ or ‘I'm going to report you to the police!’ While I considered hollering that back, I leaned forward out the window and—

“Huh...?”

Because this time I was able to catch a glimpse of the girl wearing the red overcoat.

I couldn't help but sucking in a breath of air.

She was quite a beautiful girl. Her good looks nearly froze the annoyance I had building in momentum.

In the midst of the snow, on her seemingly pure white little face, there was a little bit of flushed redness on her cheeks and nose, visible right there. Under those eyes like a chaotic sea, her almond shaped eyes glimmered like stars. Her tender curves emphasized her delicate chin and smooth forehead. No matter where you looked, she had exceedingly good looks.

In other words, if you compared her with ordinary people, her outer appearance was overwhelmingly out of their league. Look at my own ordinary face! We're the same species. Was it really fair for others to be so much worse than her? If she'd always have those kinds of looks, she could rely on that face to earn money for the rest of her life?

I actually ended up forgetting about shouting back, and entered a mode of admiration. Did that kind of girl really live around here?

But it looked like my older bro was about to dump 'that kind of girl', and he repeated once again, "please go home". After that, he closed his mouth and didn't speak anymore. Under the neverending snow, the silence continued for a while—

"Whatever... really... really whatever!"

The person who gave up first was the girl wearing the red overcoat.

After she finished shouting those last things, she turned around and ran away. No matter how you looked at it, she was clearly heartbroken.

My older brother watched her gradually fading figure for a while, gave a sigh of white fog not after long, and disappeared from my sight. When I heard the door close, I knew he had come back inside.

Ahh, ahh! I shook my head and gave a sigh. My brother had become quite incredible to actually dump a beautiful girl like her.

Compared to me... what was me?

An exam candidate!

"Honest..... Now isn't the time for this kind of thing!"

I finally woke up to reality, and hurriedly shut the window. Of course I was an exam candidate. As a matter of fact, I was an exam candidate approaching a crisis.

My room regained its tranquility, and only the softly revolving sounds of the air conditioner could be heard. I rubbed my frozen hands and walked back towards my desk.

What kind of fate was this? I actually witnessed the entire dialogue between two lovers. Of course, it's admittedly fortunate that I managed to see such a beautiful girl, but what was I doing on the eve before my exam. I stretched out and deeply reflected on how much I lost from this time. Then, I opened my notebook, and with great difficulty returned to studying mode.

I read a half-answered problem, and I muttered to myself, "Okay, so next..." And then I continued—

"If that person was Matsuzawa, it would be great!"

I completed the other half of the sentence.

I didn't mean anything deep by that. I was just thinking, if Matsuzawa came to visit me like that, I would have been so happy. Actually, the response was supposed to be like, "really want to eat steak!", "really want an electric blanket!", "really want to touch a sumo wrestler!". However, I just spoke out loud with the desires I had on my mind. After I stopped myself, my brain started answering the questions seriously.

Though—my silly soliloquies probably annoyed the God of Studying. He's probably set his mind on the useless me who's been procrastinating with studying for so long. He probably pushed the punishment button.

That was probably the case.

When I heard the sound of glass breaking, I literally jumped up from my spot.

It was a huge noise like being hit directly by lightning. Unable to cry out, I knocked over my chair, and looked in the direction where the noise came from.

And then, my eyes beheld it—

"Huuuhhhh?"

This scene of tragedy made me stop breathing.

The window beside me was completely shattered, and sharp pieces were spread completely all over the floor.

“Wha.... Wha... what...?”

The freezing wind carried in the ice and snow, dispersing my trembling voice in reaction to this sudden incident.

On the carpet, in the middle of the pile of glass fragments was a fist-sized piece of—rock.

In other words, apparently someone threw this piece of rock and broke my window. But why? If I was hit, I’d die, right? Of course not? Don’t tell me the sniper from 《Golgo 13》[\[31\]](#) was out to get me?

Since I was a bit stunned, I stood up with great difficulty. Just when I was about to to check the broken window, an even worse piece of misfortune descended on me.

“Wuaaa?”

My head suffered a direct hit from something that definitely shouldn’t be thrown at people, causing my vision to burst into sparks. When I came back to my senses, I was sitting with my butt on the ground.

Some crazy dude through the brick-like thing through the open window, and hit me directly on the face. Or to be more precise, it was the bridge of my nose.

As I sat on the ground, the murder weapon rolled to my side like dice.

It was an absolutely beautiful package in the form of a exquisite wooden box. I took it in my hands for a look, and found a note fixed to the top that said: “For Tamura Sensei”. I smelled a sweet fragrance, and without a doubt, it was the scent of chocolate.

“Wha.... what...?”

I groaned, and was left speechless.

After understanding how the chain of events had come to place, I could only be left speechless.

Some crazy person smashed my window with a rock, and threw chocolate into my room.

I staggered slightly on my feet and stood up. I was inside my house, but subzero degree wind was assailing my body. The vast expanse of white snow outside my window—the person who was running away definitely wasn't the God of Studying or Golgo 13—it was that girl wearing a red overcoat with a hood that should have gone home a while ago. The red figure didn't stay, and it was sprinting away at full speed from the scene.

Why??

Hey, why'd you do something like this?

I stared at the scene so much I forgot to be angry, and I rubbed the spot on my nose that hurt with my hand. It had this kind of sticky and warm sensation. What was it? I looked at my own hand—

“AHHHHHHHHHHH!”

Blood. It's blood! It's a nosebleed! A nosebleed!?

Aren't I an exam candidate?

Snow continued to burst in through the broken window, and in a blink of an eye, it covered the shards of glass and the carpet with snow white.

I glanced at the clock.

Just past midnight.

My entrance exam was tomorrow.

It's tomorrow! Tomorrow is my entrance exam!

But I continued to have a bloody nose, ravaged by the winter wind and snow from the huge hole in the glass. The carpet was covered with snow, and I had a feeling I was going to get a cold. I still wasn't finished with my workbook, and Matsuzawa never gave me chocolate. Tomorrow was the entrance exam, and then.... if I flunk, what do I do?

What do I do? If I ended up like that... no, it's terrible, terrible!

Insane. I think I was going insane.

“Ah-arhghghhhh....”

I'm deranged!

Is that okay?

Aauwhuahhhhhhhhhh!

Awhahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

Awhumewboowhimperwuahhhhwhimperwahhhh!

“Whimper!!!”

Right, once time passes, it never flows backwards—

“Sincerely, me. Matszuawa, what's been going on? Don't play dumb with me. Ask me what's been going on!”

I didn't know how many nights passed, but in the end it's always that same morning.

“Over at your place, honestly they should have announced the student roster already.”

That nightmarish day memory was already long ago. Before I realized it, spring was already here.

“What's going on? Tell me which school you tested into!”

And then—

“Also, I wanted to tell you, I...”

Translator notes and references[[edit](#)]

1. [↑](#) A type of outer garment worn by samurai
2. [↑](#) A kind of hat worn by men of the Kamakura period. They differed

depending the social class, age, *etc.* of the people who wore them

3. ⤴ Toodoshi are types of fiber or hide cords that hold pieces of armor together. Depending the different kind of fiber used, they are typically different colors.
4. ⤴ He speaks in formal, old speech.
5. ⤴ Specifically, a questionnaire for applying to high school
6. ⤴ Unfortunately, I don't understand this reference either.
7. ⤴ The original said something along the lines of fate, karma, *etc.*
8. ⤴ Raspy voice or sound
9. ⤴ from RPG games I think?...
10. ⤴ Original is third year of junior high.
11. ⤴ **Itadakimasu** - What japanese people say before eating.
12. ⤴ Sound of footsteps (running).
13. ⤴ Running along the outside lane of a track is a longer distance than running along the inside lane.
14. ⤴ **Go-Home Club**: Refers to anyone who isn't part of a club and goes home every day after school.
15. ⤴ Sounds of exercise.
16. ⤴ **Former Imperial Universities** - Seven universities of higher education in japan that are very famous, equivalent to the Ivy League in the United States. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Seven_Universities.
17. ⤴ **Kamikaze** - A pilot who flew suicide planes in WWII. Yukisada is hinting that Rao won't make it into those universities because he doesn't know such trivial information; hence, testing for college is suicide.
18. ⤴ Looks something like this:
http://www.acasports.co.uk/images/products/full/marcy_sit_up_bench.jpg
19. ⤴ Horse-stance and tiger-style are all references to japanese/chinese martial arts.
20. ⤴ This is the kanji for "eight"
21. ⤴ In Chinese, this is a loanword that refers to the latin dancing style, "Mambo".
22. ⤴ Aburazemi cicadas - A species of Japanese cicadas.
23. ⤴ 紅鬼: Translates to something like a red oni (a type of demon).
24. ⤴ One of Doraemon's accessories that one can use to be disguised as a rock

on the side of the road.

25. [↑](#) Chugen: A Japanese festival where gifts are given to ancestral spirits. I'm not quite sure if this is the same as O-bon(?)
26. [↑](#) Approximately 97°F.
27. [↑](#) Don't ask me why Takemiya-san gives that detail... in Asian, there are squatting toilets that you need to squat to go to the bathroom. Clearly there's no seat lids.
28. [↑](#) ""Benzaiten"": <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Benzaiten>
29. [↑](#) About 55kg
30. [↑](#) This is the girl speaking.
31. [↑](#) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golgo_13